MORAL ENTERTAINMENTS,

ON THE MOST

IMPORTANT PRACTICAL TRUTHS

OF

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

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BY THE

REV. ROBERT MANNING,

AUTHOR OF

ENGLAND'S CONVERSION AND REFORMATION COMPARED.
THE ANSWER TO THE REV. C. LESLEY'S CASE STATED, AND
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PREFACE.

THE following Entertainments having hitherto served only for the use of a private assembly, the reader must not be surprised to find me sometimes addressing myself, as is usual in sermons, to the congregation before me. However, I did not think it proper to call them by that name; because the method commonly used in sermons is very different from what I have made choice of in these discourses. But it is not at all material by what names they are called, so they do but answer the principal end they are designed for, which is, to move sinners to a serious repentance and amendment of life, and give them the best advice I can, in order to it. It was this I had principally in view, in my choice of the important truths I have handled in relation to *Death*, *Judgment*, *Hell*, and *Heaven*, the *enormity* and *fatal consequences* of *Sin*, &c. which are the subjects treated in the first thirty-one Entertainments. But what will appear peculiar in them is, that the discourses are linked together with almost the same connections as the several chapters of a book relating to one subject.

The remainder is made up of miscellaneous and unconnected subjects; some of which I was led to by

the gospels of the Sundays, on which I had occasion to speak; others were my voluntary choice, because I thought them useful to the generality of Christians. But I have always taken care not to force my text to come over to my subject, but to make my subject follow my text; so, that whoever reads but the text, will immediately know what Entertainment is prepared for him. And it is for this reason I have not confined myself to any particular gospel, nor even always to the New Testament, but allowed myself full liberty to take my text from any part of the word of God, that so I might be wholly unconstrained in the choice of my subject; wherein I always had a principal regard to the benefit of those I was to instruct.

I will not here trouble the reader with any apology for the meanness of my performance. For let that be as it will, I have done my best to do him good: And if, in reading the Entertainments, he will but take the interest of his salvation as seriously to heart as I have laboured to instruct him in the method of attaining to it, I hope I shall not be wholly frustrated of the end I have proposed to myself; which is, to be assisting to him in the management of that important concern.

However, I will not presume to flatter myself that what I have prepared will please all sorts of palates; being sensible that those who are already considerably advanced in the way of perfection, would be much more agreeably entertained with lectures of a more sublime and spiritual taste. For I cannot deny but the greatest part of the subjects I have chosen are to the persons now mentioned, much like the first rudiments of learning to a consummated scholar: and

though the very alphabet of Christianity, and the most vulgar truths of the Christian doctrine, may be rendered profitable even to the most perfect; it is certain, however, that all truths are not equally useful to all states. St. Paul spoke wisdom amongst the perfect, *sapientiam autem loquimur inter perfectos:* but to the imperfect he wrote thus, *I have fed you with milk, and not with meat, for hitherto you were not able to bear it; neither yet are ye able.* So that the circumstances of persons are no less to be considered in the choice of advice, or truths to be delivered to them, than their constitutions in the choice of meats.

I have neither written for *priests* nor *religious*, but for the laity; that is, for persons engaged in the commerce of the world, and exposed to all the dangers and corruptions of it: and those I have endeavoured *to feed with milk, and not with meat; for they are not able to bear it:* that is, I have made it my principal business to instruct them in all the most essential and indispensable duties of a Christian life; I have laid such considerations before them, as are most proper to wean their hearts from all sinful and inordinate affections to the things of this world; to inspire them with a hatred to sin, a love of virtue, and a serious concern for the salvation of their souls. Finally, I have recommended to them a regular uniformity in the practice of such exercises and devotions as are both suited to their circumstances, and will help to nourish and strengthen the forementioned Christian dispositions in their soul.

All this, I hope, they will find performed in these Entertainments; wherein if they meet sometimes with repetitions of the same truths or maxims, I must

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assure them it was wholly unavoidable. First, because since several duties flow from one and the same principle, it was impossible to explain these several duties, without repeating the principle upon which they are grounded. Secondly, Because general remedies must of necessity be repeated, as often as any particular distemper, for which they are prescribed, is spoken of. And, Thirdly, as the same unhappy state of sinners, the dangers that attend it, and the methods of their cure, are represented under divers parables or figures, in moralizing upon some of those, I was unavoidably led to a repetition of the same reflections, remonstrances, and advice, without which the subjects I had undertaken could not be fully handled, and my discourse upon it would have been manifestly defective.

But though these reasons had not obliged me to a frequent repetition of some truths, yet I believe some readers, at least, will find their account in it; for all persons are not quite so happy in their memories, nor so easy in receiving lasting impressions, but that they may stand in need of being told the same thing oftener than once. Besides, as the same meat does not always go down with an equal relish, so it is with spiritual truths, which are the food of our souls. What we may not relish, or be touched with at one time, may have better success, and affect us very sensibly at another. St. Augustine was in a moment determined to an entire change of life, by reading a few lines in St. Paul; yet it is probable he had read them many times before, but till that happy moment they had been as so much seed thrown upon a barren soil. And we observe the same diversity of success in physical prescriptions, for

the same physic administered to the same patient has a good effect sometimes, and often none at all. And, therefore, as a patient cannot reasonably be angry at his physician for repeating the same dose, as often as he thinks it for his good, so the reader cannot justly quarrel with me for giving him the same advice often over, unless he can convince me, that every one who shall read these Entertainments, will be so docile as not to stand in need of being told the same thing oftener than once, which I can rather wish than hope for; since we find by experience, that the distempers of the soul are usually even more obstinate than those of the body.

I hope I shall not need to fear being accused of too much rigour. For though I have been under a necessity of handling many severe truths, I am not conscious to myself of having overstrained any.

But be that as it will, I sincerely submit both this and whatever I have written to the judgment and correction of my superiors. And being sensible how easily some unguarded expressions may have slipped from my pen in so great a number and variety of discourses, it is my hearty request, that whether I be alive or dead, they may not be printed without being first strictly examined by some person of known judgment and learning.

MORAL ENTERTAINMENTS.

THE FIRST ENTERTAINMENT.

THE CERTAINTY OF DEATH.

In all thy works remember thy last end. Ecc. vii. 40.

MAN'S greatest weakness consists in receiving too easily impressions from sensible objects. The care and solicitudes of life fill his heart, and its pleasures corrupt it, by drawing it from God and the concerns of a future state: So that when any agreeable object presents itself, we naturally move towards it with affection, and entertain it with pleasure. It possesses the imagination, it seizes the heart; and when the place is thus taken up to our satisfaction, all serious thoughts are so much wormwood, presented to persons that are gratifying themselves with the most delicious wines: And we are so far from inviting them to us, that we usually reject them, as envious intruders, that come and disturb or embitter all our pleasures.

This easiness in our nature, of receiving violent impressions from sensible objects may be looked upon as the root of all our passions, and by consequence, of all the disorders of human life; and the best remedy against this weakness is the frequent consideration of such truths, as are most proper either to prevent the violence of those impressions, or give an early check to them, when they happen to surprise us. The remedy is distasteful indeed, but absolutely necessary, like bitter draughts to recover a decayed or depraved appetite.

Now of all the truths of the Christian religion, none are more proper to produce these happy effects, than those which regard our *last end*, especially, if by repeated serious reflections, we imprint them so deeply in our hearts, as to render them familiar to us, *In all thy works remember thy last end.* Oh, how little would this world appear, if, like the royal prophet, we always kept eternity in view! How weak would all its charms become, if we considered, and were convinced in our hearts, that they are the seeds of

everlasting misery and torments! Would men so easily venture upon the violation of God's holy law, if they remembered that there is a day to come, in which that law will judge them, and if found guilty, doom them to eternal flames! Or would they have the boldness to live on for months and years together in the state of mortal sin, if they reflected seriously that death may surprise them in that state; and, that if it should surprise them, they are lost without remedy! No, certainly. All criminal pleasures presented to a heart penetrated with these truths, would lose their relish. Innocence would find them an effectual preservative against sins; and the most corrupt temper would grow uneasy under the stings and terrors they would leave behind them.

For which reason, as the Holy Ghost has recommended to us the thoughts of death and eternity, as an universal remedy against sin; so the *evil spirit*, who opposes our salvation with the utmost malice, knowing by experience the power and efficacy of this remedy, not only in those whom it has preserved from falling, but many more, whom it has effectually delivered from the tyranny of their passions, and rescued from eternal death; the devil, I say, who has found this by experience, does all he can to keep those wholesome thoughts at the greatest distance from us; but especially from those whom he has already in his power. And therefore, if the sudden death of any person, or some exemplary judgment happens to alarm them, as it does sometimes, the devil fails not to procure them immediately some diversion, or amusement, to put it out of their heads. It frightens them a little at first, wears off by degrees, and so they think no more of it.

In like manner, if the casual hearing of some pious discourse should begin to touch them, the devil has opportunities and objects ready at hand to work upon their prevailing passions, and by means of them to prevent the continuance of any other impressions. Nay, if former objects that have served to entertain them with criminal pleasures for some time, begin to lose their charm, and grow stale upon their hands, the devil is officious enough to furnish them with fresh ones, lest their passions coming to cool, or abate with disuse, should give opportunity for serious thoughts to work them into a better disposition. And thus he leads them on thoughtless from sin to sin, till either a sudden death,

occasioned, perhaps, by the excess of criminal disorders, hurries them to the tribunal of God; or, if they have some time of sickness allowed them, they are strongly tempted to die impenitent, or at the best, have nothing but the uncertainty and deceitfulness of a death-bed repentance to depend upon for their eternal salvation. And it is one of these the devil always aims at, in diverting sinners from the wholesome thoughts of death; to the end, that by never thinking of it till it come, *rushing upon them like a storm*, (as the word of God expresses it,) they may always live unprepared for it.

In order, therefore, to prevent this irreparable misfortune, I shall now begin some considerations upon the *certainty of death;* which shall be the whole subject of this Entertainment.

The fifth chapter of Genesis furnishes us with a most excellent meditation upon death. It contains a list of those ancient patriarchs who first propagated mankind, and each verse is closed with this doleful sentence, *et mortuus est*, and he died. Adam lived 930 years, *et mortuus est*, and he died. Enos lived 905 years, *et mortuus est*, and he died. Mathusala lived 969 years, *et mortuus est*, and he died. In effect these few words, *vixit et mortuus est*, he lived and died, are a compendious history of mankind. Since of all those millions of men, women, and children, from the first that entered upon the theatre of this world, to him who went off last, the most assured account that can be given of them is, that they all *lived* and *died*. Some have been allowed to act a longer part than others; but all made their *exit* at last, and were forced to submit to the stroke of death.

Enoch also, and Elijah, who were reserved by God to be his champions against the wicked Antichrist, must undergo at last the common punishment of sin. The payment of the debt is not remitted, but delayed; and death will claim its right before they can be clothed with immortality. Nay, the blessed Mother of God, though privileged in an extraordinary manner, yet was not exempt from paying the common debt of the children of Adam. And Christ himself, having taken our sins upon him, would not enter into glory, but by becoming first *obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*

Thus Almighty God has taken care that the belief we have of the certainty of death, shall not be weakened by

any of those artifices, men ordinarily make use of, to disguise many other truths that suit not with their inclinations. For though no truth be more disrelishing to nature, than that we must once die, yet none was ever less doubted of. The unquestionable experience of so many ages already past, form in every man's judgment so full a conviction of it, that even those, who had the vanity to think themselves so far exalted above the rest of human kind, as to challenge divine honours, were never so mad as to flatter themselves into an opinion of their being exempt from the general law of death.

The devil himself, since the first sad proof of mortality in the death of Abel, never had the impudence to impose upon any man, that he should not die. It was indeed the cheat he once put upon our first parents, before experience could give him the lie. But this imposture has since been too gross to succeed a second time. He therefore says not to us, *ye shall not die,* but he only endeavours to make us believe, we shall not die so soon as perhaps we may be apt to fear. He tell us we have youth or health on our side, the prospect of many years before us, and a strong constitution, to secure us against an untimely end: Aiming by these artifices, to keep the thoughts of death at the greatest distance from us, since he cannot destroy our belief of it.

For this reason many have endeavoured to countermine the devil's craft and malice, by keeping a death's head in their bed-chambers or closets, to serve them as a looking-glass to see themselves in, and be daily put in mind of what they must once come to. So the pious Maximilian had always a coffin standing at his bed-side, that he might begin and end each day with the wholesome thought of death: and another prince, for the same purpose, ordered one of his pages to greet him daily with this morning salutation, *Remember that thou art a mortal man.*

However, we need not have recourse to such extraordinary expedients, to put us in mind of our mortality. The very air we breathe, the meat we daily eat, and the clothes we wear, to hinder death from seizing us, before the time ordained by Providence, may do this office for us. Nay, the very earth whereon we tread, under which there lie already crumbled into dust, so many of our acquaintance and relations, who were once as gay and merry, as strong and healthful, as the youngest of this company, may, as we walk,

and often loiter away our precious hours, put us in mind what costly matter these bodies, we so idolize, were originally composed of, and what they must again return into. We need no other monitor to make us remember that their beginning was, and end will be, no other than dust and clay.

Who is the man alive (says David) *that will not see death?* For the certainty of death is the same as that of life. Because life, if rightly considered, is but the way or passage to death; into which (says Seneca) whoever is once entered, must continue without stopping till he falls into the hands of death. *Remember* (says Solomon) *that death stops not:* and the reason is, because life stops not. So that life is nothing but a continual dying; that is, a continual moving towards its end, which is death. For which reason, the word of God compares man's life to a *race*. Which similitude expresses both the swiftness and uninterrupted continuance of its course. And we may truly say, we have already consumed all the years we have lived; since what is past can now no more be reckoned a part of our lives, than the blood out of our veins, or what age has already consumed of our bodies, can be called a part of our present being.

Since, therefore, all must die; since death is an irresistible debt which all must pay to nature; since we are already dying, and in the hands of death, we ought in time to contract a familiarity with it, that we may not be surprised, when it comes to seize us once for all.

St. Austin, upon these words of the Psalmist, *Let them descend alive into Hell*, gives this most excellent advice: *Let us descend alive, that we may not descend into Hell when we are dead.* Now it would be no less profitable, to go down sometimes by thought and meditation into the grave of some deceased friend; where, if our curiosity invites us, to inquire what state his soul is now in, let us reflect upon his life past; and we may in some degree, though not with an infallible certainty, inform ourselves. Because a good life is generally rewarded with a happy death, and a happy death seldom follows a bad life.

If he lived (as St. Paul exhorts us) *temperately, justly, and godly, looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ*, we may confidently pronounce the soul of that man happy. But, if on the contrary, he *followed ungodliness and*

worldly lusts, if he live in the practice of wilful sin, and continued it to his last sickness; it is true, indeed, we cannot pass a peremptory sentence upon him, because the depth of God's mercies is as unsearchable as his judgments; yet we may without any danger of rash judgment, pronounce his salvation to be very doubtful, and even questionable beyond the ordinary degree of uncertainty, which attends the generality of men, whatever appearances there may be for or against him.

Let us consider next, that as he was once what we are now, strong and healthful, big with projects for the time to come, and as little suspecting the stroke of death, as the rest of his surviving friends, so must we be once what he now is, (and God Almighty knows how soon) wrapped up in a shroud, shut up within a narrow coffin, laid under ground, trampled upon by future generations, and, in a word, as little either thought or spoken of as he now is. Our dearest friends will then pass by us, or walk over us, with the same indifference and unconcern, as if we were a thing of past ages, and had never had the least share in their thoughts. And here is an end of all that esteem and love, we often court with so much passion, and purchase, perhaps, by pawning soul and conscience for it. This is the reward we must expect, from this so much adored and courted world. Oh, how truly happy are they, whose hearts are fixed on God alone; who are enamoured of no beauty, and seek no love but his. For this is a solid and lasting good, which alone could comfort us at the hour of death, accompany us even beyond the grave, where all things else forsake us; and when these bodies are turned into dust, render our souls eternally happy.

But let us still pass on to a third consideration, and imagining ourselves to be in the grave with some deceased friend, let us entertain ourselves with him for some few moments, and ask him some account of the other world. Let us enquire what his thoughts now are of his life past. Oh, let his condition be what it will, we may be sure, that if he were allowed to speak his answer would be, that were he to live his past years over again, he would employ them otherwise than he did formerly, or we do now. All worldly pleasures, sinful excesses, unprofitable amusements to trifle away time, pursuit of honours, heaping up riches, studying revenge, and the like, would be the farthest from his thoughts.

For, if his soul be happily united to God, the blessed sight of that incomprehensible majesty, that infinite goodness, and infinite wisdom, has now given him a quite different idea from what he formerly had, or men can have in this life, of the monstrous blackness and deformity of sin. He would tell us, that were his soul to return again to his body, it were impossible he should ever have the heart to offend God with deliberate reflection.

But if his soul, unworthy yet to be admitted to the blessed fruition, be for some time condemned to purging flames, till she be purified from all dross and alloy of earthly defilements, and has paid the last farthing of the debt contracted by his past follies; Oh! could he utter his thoughts, he would give you a most lamentable account of his sufferings. He would tell you, his soul is tortured with unspeakable anguish for his past sins; that his grief, for being kept back from the enjoyment of Almighty God, is beyond expression or imagination; finally, that all the torments of this world are not to be compared with the least of those his soul endures.

But what a frightful account would he give of his condition, if his unhappy soul be doomed to everlasting flames! With what piercing, though fruitless sorrow, would he bewail his past pleasures! How many heavy curses would he heap upon this treacherous world, or rather his own treacherous passions, which to gratify themselves have betrayed him to eternal misery and torment! He would doubtless tell us with the deepest anguish of a despairing soul, that were he master of ten thousand worlds, he would joyfully sacrifice them all for one hour of that time, of which we are as lavish as if it were of no value: He would embrace with joy, though it were for millions of years, the most rigid penance that ever was undergone, so he were but once more under a possibility of saving his soul.

This is undoubtedly the account he would give us of the other world, if he were permitted to utter his thoughts, and is, without dispute, a faithful representation of the ideas the souls departed have of the eternal state, in which they are now fixed, and towards which we are hastening as fast as the wings of time, and the short course of an uncertain perishable life can carry us.

And what remains then, but that we now begin whilst we have yet time, what we shall otherwise hereafter wish

to have done, with a fruitless repentance of our having neglected to do it, whilst we had it in our power. Remember Christians, and reflect seriously upon it, that you must once die. It is as certain, and as much above all dispute, as that you are now alive. God Almighty has decreed it from eternity, and his decrees are as unchangeable as himself. Dying, therefore, is a part you must act: But it depends upon your own free will, to make death a passage to a happy or unhappy eternity. If you live well, God's grace will not abandon you in your last conflict, but strengthen you to *die the death of the just*, which is *precious in his sight*. But if you live ill, you run a dreadful hazard of being justly permitted, by Almighty God, to die as you lived.

It, therefore, highly concerns us all to make our whole life a continual preparation for death. This is the only end for which it was bestowed upon us, and for which it has been till now, and is still continued to us by the divine bounty. If hitherto we have not answered these purposes, it is now high time to think seriously of it; and how happy are we that it is still time! What a mercy is it that we have not been cut off, whilst we were guilty of mortal sin, which has been our case so often! Where should we now be, if this had happened to us, as it has to millions before us? Can we think of it without trembling? Can we think of it without a sense of gratitude to the infinite goodness that has preserved us, and hatred to those sins which would have rendered us eternally unhappy? These are doubtless, the fruits which God's forbearance expects of us. This is the use we ought henceforward to make of it. And then death will cease to be an evil to us. For though death joined with sin be the greatest of evils, it is a real good without it, as being a secure passage to a happy eternity.

SECOND ENTERTAINMENT.

CONCERNING SOME GENERAL PREPARATIONS FOR DEATH.

Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching. Luke xii. 37.

In my last discourse, I furnished you with some considerations upon the certainty of death. But this truth, though ever so evident and weighty, can be no farther use-

ful to us, than it has an influence upon the conduct of our lives. For what will it avail us to have a speculative persuasion that we must once die, unless we conclude practically from it, that it is therefore our duty as well as interest, to be always prepared for it.

This then is the immediate consequence to be drawn from it, viz. that since we are created to be happy, and our happiness depends upon dying well, it follows, that the principal business of life, ought to be a preparation for death. This is that *one, and only necessary thing*, which admits of no dispensation, and every thing in the world ought to yield, and be sacrificed to it. Ease, interest, honour, and pleasure are to be consulted no otherwise than as they have a reference to the general end of living and dying well. The subject then of this Entertainment shall be, the general previous disposition required for the happy performance of this great work, that is, some general directions relating how we ought to dispose ourselves beforehand for death.

The prophet Isaias being sent by God to king Ezekias, to forewarn him of his approaching end, delivered his message in these words: *Put thy house in order, for thou shalt die, and thou shalt not live.* This advice of the prophet, *put thy house in order*, if literally taken, regards particularly those, who have their wills to make, or any temporal concerns to settle before they die; and calls very pressingly upon them, to prepare themselves for their last end, by an early discharge of this duty. For we may truly say, they are but very ill managers, either of their spiritual or temporal concerns, who, either out of sloth, or a kind of indolent temper, or upon any other frivolous motive, put off their making their wills to the last extremity: it being a business that requires a greater presence of mind, than can be expected from a person labouring under the anguish of a mortal distemper. Besides, how easily may a dying man be imposed upon, by interested persons about him, at a time, when for a little ease, he is ready to consent to any thing that is suggested to him. And so it may, in effect, become their will instead of his: to say nothing of the unseasonableness of such a concern, at a time when his thoughts ought to look quite another way, and be wholly turned towards the other world, where he is then going to make his eternal abode.

But the ill consequences of these delays will yet appear more clearly, if we consider the hazard they expose a dying person to, of dying without making any will at all. For this is the unavoidable consequence, if he either happens to die suddenly, or to be out of his senses in his last sickness. And how fatal has this often proved to families, by engaging them in endless quarrels and law-suits! Nay, how prejudicial must it needs be to those, who have a just title to have some provision made for them, though perhaps not grounded upon any law that can compel the next heir to it, and are by this means deprived of a necessary subsistence, whilst all is swept away by some one, who either deserves or wants it least, and will have no regard either to proximity of blood, or the intention of the party deceased, or the merits of those, whose past services entitle them to a gratification, as much as any human laws.

But as the making of *wills*, so the payment of *debts*, is a duty not to be deferred to our last sickness. Many have their hearts so set upon their money, that they cannot resolve to part with it till such time as they can keep it no longer. These, therefore, ought to consider, that a person in debt, is but another person's cash-keeper; and that the sum he owes is but money deposited in his hands, which he cannot detain with justice any longer than he has the express or tacit consent of the party who has a right to it. So that when the creditor demands it with justice and reason, the debtor, if able, is under an obligation of conscience to pay it. Nay, he is bound to make himself able, as soon as he can, by retrenching all superfluous and unnecessary expenses. After which all affected delays, are no better than so many repeated acts of injustice, which he cannot answer to God, nor man. Nor will his resolving to discharge all debts, when he is called upon to pay the common debt of nature, be any plea in favour of this practice; because we are bound not only to die, but live like honest men. And it is much to be suspected, that he who has not the heart to part with his money, but when he can keep it no longer, dies with a good will to have kept it longer if he could; which, considering that in the case before us, it implies injustice as well as avarice, is but a very ill disposition to accompany him to the other world.

I will therefore conclude this head, with repeating to you the prophet's advice: *put thy house in order*. Expect not

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the approach of death to settle the concerns of this life. Do justice to your neighbour, whilst it is a free and voluntary act; and it will be a comfort in your distress both of mind and body, to have no other business then upon your hands, than the performing well the last scene of life.

However, besides this preparatory disposition, consisting in the regulation of the most important temporary concern, there is another *house* each christian has to *put in order*, to dispose himself for death, viz. his own soul. And this is the great business of life, and undoubtedly challenges his principal care.

Consider therefore, christian, what condition thy house is in. Examine every part of it with a diligent and impartial eye. Is thy *faith* built upon that *rock* which Christ speaks of? Is it proof against all storms of temptations and persecutions? Is there a foundation of *humility*, laid deep enough to bear the superstructure of all other virtues? Are the *doors* and *windows* of thy house, I mean thy senses, strongly guarded against the assaults of vanity, and fleshly lusts? Does nothing appear on the outside, that may scandalize or offend thy neighbour?

But, above all let us consider how this house of ours is fitted within. Is it furnished suitable to the infinite dignity of the divine guest who is to lodge in it? Does the Holy Ghost make his constant abode there, or do we not often entertain his mortal enemy? Is it not frequently haunted with evil spirits, and God Almighty forsaken in it? We may easily judge what state it is in, if we but reflect who governs, what order is kept, what regulations and methods are observed. Is there as good economy in our spiritual as temporal concerns? Is there as much care taken to preserve the life, health, and beauty of the soul, as of the body? Is there a time set apart for prayer, spiritual reading, examination of conscience, and other devotions as well as for eating, sleeping, diversions and worldly employments? In a word, is *charity* or *self-love* mistress within? Does *reason* or *passion*, *justice* or *humour* bear the greatest sway? If *self-love*, *passion*, and *humour* govern; alas, it cannot be doubted, but the whole house is in disorder and confusion. And how unhappy is the soul, which death finds in this state!

But if *charity* be mistress, if *justice*, *reason*, and *religion* are consulted, in all concerns, both spiritual and temporal,

there is sufficient ground to judge our house is in good order, and we need not fear to be surprised by death; for where *charity* is mistress of the heart, where *piety* and *fear of God* take place of *passion* and *inclination*, there the Holy Ghost resides undoubtedly in the soul; and where the divine guest makes his abode, all must be orderly and well-disposed. Such a soul is always prepared for her last summons. Death will indeed destroy her house of clay, but it is in order to translate her to those heavenly mansions, where all the virtues which adorned her here below, and fitted her for the state of bliss, will be either rewarded, or receive their final accomplishment and perfection.

Whence it appears that the preparation we are to make for death, is no other than that which is to fit us for Heaven. Now, nothing can fit us for *H*eaven, but what will be either rewarded or perfected in Heaven. *Faith* and *hope, patience* in adversity, *love of enemies, pardoning injuries*, and the like, are virtues, which, to speak properly, will not be perfected, but rewarded in Heaven.—For, as divines teach, there is neither *faith* nor *hope* in Heaven. Because by *faith*, we only know God obscurely as through a mist or cloud, whereas in Heaven we shall see him *face* to *face*. *Hope* also, though ever so firm, is always mixed with some *fear*, and regards a good not yet possessed; whereas fruition, which is the reward of the life to come, is an actual possession of God, attended with such an infallible security, as excludes all fear or doubt. *Patience* and *love of enemies*, can likewise have no place in Heaven; because in Heaven there are no *enmities* nor *crosses* to be suffered. However, these virtues are necessary to dispose us for Heaven, because its joys are the reward of them; and those can have no title to the reward, who comply not with the conditions upon which it is promised.

But there are other virtues, as *piety, humility, purity, conformity to the will of God*, and *charity* (the queen, or rather the life and soul of all virtues) which will not only be rewarded, but perfected in Heaven. So that whoever is void of these virtues at the hour of death, wants the dispositions that are requisite to qualify him for the state of bliss. The reason is evident, because the spiritual life of the just in this world differs nothing in substance from the eternal life of the saints in Heaven, since both the one and

the other consist chiefly in the *knowledge* and *love of God.* But as the blessed in Heaven have a clearer and more perfect knowledge of him, so is their love, and other virtues following from it, proportionably greater, and therefore differ indeed from those they possessed on earth, in their eminency and perfection, but not in their nature or substance.

Whence it follows, that when a soul adorned with these virtues leaves her earthly mansion, nothing more is requisite to render her eternally happy, but only to perfect those very gifts she brings with her, and give, as it were, the finishing stroke to the work of grace, so happily begun and carried on with perseverance in this life. But if none of these gifts or graces which *glory* is to perfect, be found in her at her entrance into the other world, what other fate can she expect, than to be for ever excluded from that blessed state? For how can they pretend to the glory of the saints, who, neglecting in this life to lay the foundation of it, remain void of those necessary previous dispositions, by which the saints took care to fit themselves for it? Or how can they lay claim to the reward of virtue, who bring not with them the virtues to entitle them to it? 'Tis certainly a great delusion, to think to pass from a life defiled with sin, to a state wholly inconsistent with it. The saints and angels, who are without a spot or stain, will not admit into their blessed society but such as, like themselves, are pure and holy. Neither will Almighty God own them for coheirs to the crown and kingdom of his Son, who have wilfully renounced, and not recovered the grace, that made them his *adopted children.* 'Tis to these unfortunate souls St. Austin addresses himself in the following words; *Brethren, we must know, that neither pride, nor avarice, nor luxury ascends with* Christ: *No vice of ours ascends with our heavenly physician.* For since the principal end of his coming into this world, was to cure the distempers of our souls, and render us thereby capable of eternal life, it follows, that they who not only neglect to make use of the remedies his goodness has provided for them, but seek rather to increase their distempers, can have no part with him. So that whoever cherishes any criminal passion, and continues in this way till his exit out of this life, whither, alas, must he go! Heaven will not receive him; neither are the flames of purga-

tory sufficient to cleanse him. No other place then remains for him, but that of everlasting horror and confusion; where, being incapable of change, his soul will for ever remain under those very disorders, in which death found him.

I know there are many, who being engaged in some sinful habit, and terrified with the considerations of death and eternity, have frequent thoughts, and seemingly, at least, resolve to reform their lives. But I know not how their old habits, pressing daily hard upon them, and their sinful inclinations still gaining ground by being often gratified, these good thoughts and resolutions often come to nothing; nay, what is worse, serve only to lessen their fears, and betray them into a kind of security, by making them think themselves better than they really are, because they seemingly resolve to be so for the future. And thus they usually go on, until they are either surprised by a sudden and unprovided death, or at least reduced to the last and miserable shift of a death-bed repentance.

I hope this will never be the case of any one here present. However, let us now suppose, which God forbid, that any one of you should fall into your last sickness, whilst engaged in any vicious habit, as of cursing or swearing, drunkenness, impurity, or the like; do you rightly apprehend the consequence of it? If you do not, give me leave to represent it to you. The consequence is, that in the case supposed you have no other hazard for your soul's salvation than that of a death-bed repentance. The consequence is evident. For if a mortal distemper should seize you, whilst you are yet engaged in any habit of sin, all that you have to depend upon is that preparation, which your last sickness will allow you to make: and that I call a death-bed repentance.

You will say, perhaps, you have no thoughts of hazarding your soul upon so dangerous an after-game. I believe you have not; but you deceive yourselves. For though you do not expressly design any such thing, the devil does. And if you pursue those very courses, which will most certainly, sooner or later, bring you to it, what matter is it, whether you design it or not? No man designs expressly to damn himself; and yet too many, God knows, study as effectually their own damnation, as if they expressly designed it. And so it happens in the case before

us. For though very few are so desperately mad as to resolve expressly to hazard all upon a death-bed repentance, yet all those, who continue from year to year in their sinful habits, take almost as direct a way to it, as if they formed an express design of it. And therefore the devil is not so very solicitous to engage sinners in so desperate a resolution, because he finds his work almost as effectually done without it. Nay, he often seeks to amuse them with seeming resolutions of changing their lives in good time, so as to hide them from the precipice into which they are running; the dread whereof might frighten them into safer courses. All he has to do in the mean time, is to continue them on in their wonted relapses till their last sickness overtakes them; and then the necessity of depending upon a death-bed repentance follows of course.

Let me therefore once more put this question to you, *Is your house in order?* Are your souls in a readiness for death? Would you be willing to be summoned to your last account this very day? Have you already made a sufficient preparation for it? Happy they who are so beforehand with the great work of salvation, that their last hour, whenever it comes, may find it fully finished.

THIRD ENTERTAINMENT.

ON SUDDEN DEATHS.

Watch ye, therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour. Matt. xxv. 13.

Though nothing be more certain than death, nothing is more uncertain than the time and circumstances of it. So that no man, though in the most perfect state of health, can make any guess, whether death will come soon or late, whether it will be sudden or foreseen. And this, of all the circumstances hid from us, is the most frightful. For though the precise time of its coming were kept from our knowledge, yet if we were but sure it would not seize us on a sudden, this at least would be some comfort. But, alas! this comfort is denied us; and the reason why it is denied us is, because God will oblige us to be always watchful, and in a readiness for his summons at what time soever, and in what manner soever he shall please to call upon us.

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For this reason, I say, God has concealed from us not only the time of our death, but every circumstance relating to it. So that of all the goods we possess in this world, life itself is the most uncertain, nor have we the least encouragement to build any security upon it. It may be taken from us when we least think of it, and in so sudden a manner as to leave us no interval of time between perfect health and the stroke of death. It is upon these terms we first entered into the world, and we continue in it upon the same uncertain footing. The subject then of this Entertainment shall be the uncertainty of human life, and the many dangers to which it is exposed of being taken from us by a sudden death.

Death being the punishment of sin, and all men since the fall of Adam being conceived in sin, it follows, that life is no sooner communicated to us, but we come within the general sentence of death, and are doomed to die even before we are born. Hence many pass immediately from the womb to the grave, and are never allowed to see the sun shine upon them. Others step no sooner into the world, but go off again immediately, as if they came upon no other business than to die. Others again, after having with much care and nursing gone through the most dangerous part of life, disappoint in a moment the flattering hopes of their tender parents, and become a prey to death, when they are just of age to begin to taste the pleasures of life.

It is true, great numbers survive this age, and have a longer lease of life allowed them. And most of us here present are bound to acknowledge the divine bounty, in having favoured us with this blessing. However, since sentence of death is already passed upon us, we are but in the condition of condemned criminals, reprieved until such time as it shall please the sovereign arbiter of life and death to give his orders for our execution. In the mean time, every step we make during the short course of this mortal life, brings us nearer to the grave : and it often happens, that whilst men are pleasing themselves with the thoughts of a long and merry life, they find themselves all of a sudden in the hands of death, and hurried to the other world at a time as unwelcome perhaps as unexpected.

This was the unhappy fate of the rich man mentioned

in the gospel, who, whilst he was projecting how to indulge himself with the treasures he had laid up, was summoned to render his soul the very night he was amusing himself with these vain thoughts. This was also the unfortunate end of Balthazar, that proud king of Babylon: who, amidst his drunken cups, and profane night revels, but too often practised by our modern christians, saw a hand upon the wall before him writing the sentence of his condemnation, which was accordingly executed upon him that very night.

How many have been struck dead in the very moment they were gratifying some criminal passion! How many have been called to the tribunal of God, with the cups in their hands, or *blasphemy* or *perjury* in their mouths! In a word, how many have laid themselves down to sleep in as perfect health as any of us all, and never more saw the rising sun! Or risen in the morning as sound in body, as sick perhaps in soul, and have not been allowed to outlive that day.

Now the natural reason of this great uncertainty of human life is, first and chiefly the very structure of man's body, in regard of the incredible number and variety of parts, whereof it is composed: and amongst which many, particularly those which lodge and convey the blood and vital spirits from part to part are so slender and weak, that it seems next to a miracle, that some of them are not broken with every sudden or violent motion of the body, and yet so necessary to the preservation of life, that the breaking of any may prove fatal to it.

So that man's body may be fitly compared to an artificial machine, composed of innumerable little springs and wheels, the stopping or breaking any of which, either stops all the rest, or at least, causes an irregularity in their motion, and puts the whole machine out of order. For just so it happens in man's body, which consisting of innumerable little parts of different sorts, and all depending upon each other, and contributing to the harmony of the whole; if but any of them receive a hurt, or happens to be discomposed, the whole machine of the body is affected with it, and in danger of being destroyed.

Thus many have been killed with an inward bruise, the cutting of an artery, or breaking of a vein. Insomuch that anatomists, whose business it is to study the structure of

human bodies, considering the prodigious number of veins, fibres, arteries, sinews, muscles, nerves, and other parts of which they are composed, assure us, that the unhappy end of those, who are taken away by sudden or untimely deaths, is more to be lamented than wondered at, and that we rather ought to be surprised that greater numbers fall not daily under the like misfortunes.

But besides the dependence our lives have upon the harmony of such numberless and different parts, that enter into the composition of man's body, they also depend upon several outward things, as *meat*, *drink*, *air*, and the like; which often, instead of preserving them, are instrumental to their destruction. Thus, when an epidemical distemper reigns, the air itself being for the most part infected, it is dangerous even to breathe, though we cannot live one moment without it. Thus, death is often conveyed to us from the breath or clothes of those we converse with. Thus, finally, many meet their death in the very *meat*, or *drink*, or *physic*, which they take to prevent it. May not a mortal fever be catched in a moment, and send the strongest man alive to his grave in a few days warning? *Surfeits*, *pleurisies*, and *quinsies*, often make a quicker dispatch, and *apoplexies* give no warning at all.

Add to all this the innumerable accidents which have no inward cause, but attack us from abroad, and cannot be prevented with the greatest caution possible; as the fall of a horse, the overturning of a coach, an accidental fire, or such as are occasioned by thunder, lightning, or violent storms. And are not some of these the daily ministers of sudden deaths? Do not the weekly bills of mortality of one great city only, furnish us almost continually, with some instance of this nature? So that with the frail structure of our bodies on the one hand, and the innumerable accidents to which they are exposed on the other, man's life hangs by so weak and slender a thread, that nothing but the greatest blindness and stupidity imaginable can make us hazard our eternal salvation on the long continuance of it.

It is certain, that considering both the greatness of the hazard, and the eternal consequences depending upon it, there needs no more to oblige all men, that are not wholly lost to faith and reason, to live with the same watchfulness and precaution, as if they were infallibly assured, that a sudden death would be their lot some time or other. We

ought indeed to pray and hope it will not: but it is most certain, no man can have a positive security against it. For since the natural and immediate causes are either the usual accidents from abroad, against which there is no shelter, or the inward dispositions of the body, which are so hidden and secret, that no man can tell how near the danger threatens, what manner of assurance can any man have, that a sudden death will not be his destiny?

It is true, there is an over-ruling providence, which governs all things, *reaches strongly from end to end, and disposes all things sweetly.* So that, as Christ himself assures us, there falls not even a single hair from our heads but by his orders. Our mortal bodies, as they are God's workmanship no less than our immortal souls, so are they no less the object of his care. And though we ourselves are under him entrusted with the management of them, and are bound to perform our parts to the utmost of our power, yet since we are but as instruments under his direction, it is the same invisible and unerring hand, by which they were first formed, that now rules and guides them; and can, if it pleases, conduct them safe through all the stages of human life, to the natural end of their mortal race. And therefore it is not to be questioned, but Almighty God, who is the supreme cause, and first mover of all things, has it in his power to dispose natural causes, so as to preserve us from all accidents of sudden and untimely deaths.

All this, I say, is true, and it is the greatest comfort good christians have, to consider that they live under the conduct and protection of an all-ruling providence, which will not permit any thing to happen to them, but what may contribute to their greater good, and the security of their eternal welfare; so that the many perils wherewith they live encompassed, serve only to excite their fervour in good works, and encrease their trust and confidence in God, to whom they cry out with full assurance, in these words of the Psalmist, *Though I shall walk in the shade of death, I will fear no evil, because thou art with me.*

But in all this, there is not the least encouragement or comfort for ill livers, and their case is in all respects as different as their lives from that of the just. The reason hereof is very plain; because, though there be a *general providence,* that extends itself to all mankind, yet there

is besides a *special* one, which only regards God's faithful servants, and in which ill livers have no share. The three Israelites walked in the Babylonian furnace as in a refreshing air, whilst those who kindled the flames, were consumed by them. Daniel was as safe in the midst of lions, as in the company of lambs; whereas his accusers could scarce reach the ground, before they were devoured by them. It is true, these events being miraculous, no general rule can be drawn from them. But whether God makes use of supernatural means, or employs natural causes to bring about the designs of his providence, the effect is the same; and though we see not manifest miracles, it is not to be doubted, but God disposes natural causes, so if in favour of his faithful servants, as to protect them from a thousand accidents, in which they would have perished, without his special providence watching over them.

But suppose a sudden death should be the lot of a just man, as it sometimes comes to pass, and has happened even to great saints, we can look upon it no otherwise than a providential mercy upon him; Almighty God making use of this way to preserve him from the usual terrors of death, to hasten his passage to a better life, and perhaps to prevent his falling into occasions, which might have drawn him into sin. But to ill livers a sudden death is always an irreparable evil; since it deprives them in an instant of every thing in which they placed their happiness in this life, and throws them into a state of endless misery and torments. So that the very same thing, which may be a mercy to the just, and turn to their greater good, as all things do by the secret dispensation of providence, is on the contrary the severest judgment that can fall upon sinners. And yet these very persons, who alone have reason to apprehend a sudden death, are they who usually fear it the least: And the reason why they fear it the least, is not their courage, but stupidity. They choose rather to hazard dying any way without thinking of it, than to disturb their pleasures with the thought of so ungrateful an object: And so it naturally follows, that as they seldom or never think of death, they are the most liable to be surprised by it.

But what way soever we consider sudden deaths, whether with regard to natural or supernatural causes, it is manifest, that none have greater reason to apprehend their

perishing that way, than they whose disorderly lives deserve no better end, and are often the natural occasion of it. How many have perished in unjust quarrels, occasioned by luxury and gaming, or night revels! How many destroy themselves by excessive debauches! Or, by a long course of irregularities, lay a train of natural dispositions, whence apoplexies, or other immediate causes of sudden death, are gradually formed?

But let us suppose the strength of their natural constitution renders them proof against accidents of that nature, (of which, however, no man can be sure) what shelter have they against misfortunes that may surprise them from abroad? If they say they are upon as good a footing as the rest of mankind, this is a great mistake, unless they mean that part of mankind which is as bad as themselves. Pious Christians are under the special protection of Almighty God, and if they die suddenly, death renders them eternally happy; to both which advantages ill livers have forfeited their title. They are God's enemies, and as they have withdrawn themselves from the order established by his holy law, so he withdraws from them the benefit of that peculiar providence, with which he watches over his obedient servants. So that when the time is come, in which he designs to make any of them examples of his justice, he abandons them to their unhappy state. He neither keeps danger at a distance from them, nor removes them out of the reach of danger. And though in all this there appears nothing out of the ordinary course of nature, yet the execution of these criminals is as particularly ordered by the divine justice, as if the hand of God appeared visibly in it: His infinite wisdom disposing natural causes in such a manner as to give them an infallible tendency to the end for which they are designed. But whatever name we give to sudden deaths of this nature, whether we call them *accidents*, or *judgments*, according as they have a reference to several causes, they are equally fatal in their consequences, and the punishment is equally severe, whether it be immediately inflicted by the hand of God, or occasioned by what we call *accident*, because eternal death is the infallible consequence of it.

However, that there may be no room left to doubt, but that the sudden death of sinners may be regarded as a designed punishment of their ill lives, the word of God threat-

ens them expressly with it, as is manifest from St. Paul's Epistle to the Thessalonians, chap. v. ver. 2, 3. where he tells them, *That the day of the Lord shall so come, as a thief in the night: For when they shall say, peace and security; then shall sudden destruction come upon them, as the pains upon her that is with child, and they shall not escape.* And our Saviour says no less in the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew; where, having exhorted his disciples to be watchful, he proposes to them the parable of the good and wicked servant, which he concludes with these remarkable words: *But if that evil servant shall say in his heart, my lord is long a coming, and shall begin to strike his fellow-servants, and shall eat and drink with drunkards; the Lord of that servant shall come in a day that he hopeth not, and at an hour that he knoweth not: and shall separate him, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* From which words it plainly appears, that sudden deaths ought many times to be considered not barely as the effect of accident or constitution, but as a particular punishment of sin—a just revenge upon sinners; God in his secret judgments ordering it so, that they, who in the course of their lives neglected the ordinary means to dispose themselves for death, should in the end want the opportunity and benefit of a particular preparation for it.

But, O good God! what tongue is able to express the fatal consequences of such a death! What becomes of a soul charged with the guilt of mortal sin at the moment of her separation from the body! She is hurried in an instant to the dreadful tribunal, receives her irrevocable doom, is banished from the sight of God, and plunged into hell-fire, where shame and despair, horror and confusion, remorse without ease, and torments without comfort, are to be her everlasting portion.

O God, preserve us from this misfortune. Let any but that which is irreparable happen to us. Enable us with thy grace to live so, that we may die the death of the just; and conduct us through whatever ways thou pleasest, so they but bring us to the happy end for which we are created.

FOURTH ENTERTAINMENT.

SOME PRACTICAL INFERENCES DRAWN FROM THE UNCERTAINTY OF HUMAN LIFE, AND THE DANGER OF SUDDEN DEATH.

Watch ye, therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour. Matt. xxv. 13.

HAVING, in my last discourse, laid before you the uncertainty of human life, the weak foundation upon which it is built, how many accidents may rob us of it, and, what is most frightful, how little security we have that it will not be snatched from us by a sudden death; it remains now to improve these truths, by drawing some instructive inferences from them which shall be the subject of this Entertainment.

The first instructive inference to be drawn from the uncertainty of human life is, that we ought not to set our hearts upon anything in this world. For is it not a folly to set our hearts upon things which death may rob us of every moment, and will certainly take away from us some time or other? It is the argument our Saviour made use of to his disciples to wean their hearts from the world, and turn their affections towards heaven. *Lay not up treasures* (says Christ) *for yourselves upon earth, where the moth and the worms do corrupt, and where thieves break in and steal.* For what wise man would be solicitous to lay up treasures, or set his heart upon them, if he were sure they were all to become a prey to thieves? Now death is the great thief, who always lies in wait for us, and will sooner or later rifle all our worldly goods, and strip us naked of whatever we possess. For we must all go as naked out of the world, as we first entered into it. Honours, riches, pleasures, friends and relations, all must be left behind; only our works, whether good or bad, will stick to us, and accompany us to the tribunal of God, either to condemn or save us. So that the whole world perishes as effectually to every dying man, as if it were at that instant reduced to ashes. And is it not then a notorious folly to set our hearts upon it, or love any thing in it to the prejudice of our eternal salvation?

For this reason St. Paul writes thus to the Corinthians: *This therefore I say, brethren, the time is short: it re-*

maineth, that they also who have wives, be as if they had none: and they that weep, as though they wept not: and they that rejoice, as if they rejoiced not: and they that buy, as though they possessed not: and they that use this world, as if they used it not: for the fashion of this world passeth away. 1 Cor. vii. 29, 30, 31. By which words he exhorts them to keep their hearts so free and disengaged from all inordinate affections to the things of this life, that even amidst the possession and use of them, they may enjoy the same liberty of spirit, as if they had effectually renounced both the one and the other.

For the same reason St. Peter exhorts all Christians to be as *pilgrims* or *travellers* in this world; because, as travellers, though they make use of conveniences they meet with upon the road, yet have always principally an eye upon the proposed end of their journey, so Christians ought to have their thoughts so turned towards death, and the world to come, which is in the end of their journey, that whilst they use indeed the things of this life, according to the order of Providence, that is, within the bounds of necessity or reasonable convenience, their hearts may still remain free, or as St. Peter expresses it, *abstain from fleshly lusts*, that is, from all sorts of inordinate love, or immoderate desire of creatures. And truly, since all inordinate affections are contrary to the Christian spirit, and an obstacle to salvation, this alone ought to be motive enough to keep our hearts free from them. But the difficulties they will one day add to the natural terrors of death, is a no less powerful consideration to make us apply ourselves to an entire disengagement from all clogs of this nature. To die, is in itself a terrible thing; nature startles at the thought of it, and the fear of judgment very much increases its terror; but to die with a heart full of love of the world, is frightful beyond imagination.

This appeared plainly in the unfortunate Agag, who having wallowed in all the pleasures of a voluptuous life, when he saw himself just ready to fall a sacrifice to the divine vengeance, cried out with the deepest anguish of mind, *Does bitter death separate so?* For what a racking thought must it needs be to a lover of this world, when feeling himself at the point of death, he considers that he must now be in a moment torn away from all those things, in which he has till then placed all his happiness, content, and satisfac-

tion! He has till then been passionately fond of pleasures, and now he must enjoy them no more. He has set his heart upon riches, and now he must leave them all behind. He has made some wretched creature the idol of his passion, and now he finds himself condemned to an eternal separation from that object. Oh, could we but see the heart of a person dying under these unhappy circumstances, we should there discover a frightful scene of terror, grief and anguish. We should find there fully verified this saying of *Ecclesiasticus, O Death, how bitter is thy memory to a man, who places his content in the enjoyment of his wealth!* So that to entertain or nourish in ourselves any worldly passion, or violent inclination, is in effect to nourish a viper, which will one day gnaw our very bowels. It is to prepare the torture for ourselves, and sow the seeds of future dejection and despair: Which, though stifled amidst the business, amusements, and diversions of life, will not fail to produce their full effect at the terrible approach of death. And, therefore, since we are uncertain how near we are already to it, we ought to lose no time, but hasten all we can to remove from our hearts all such inordinate affections, as are most like to encrease the difficulties of our last hour, and heighten the terrors which death brings naturally with it. And this, as I have said, is the first practical inference to be drawn from the uncertainty of human life.

The second is, that we ought to set a great value upon the time present, and manage it with the utmost care. For since time is given us by God for the gaining of eternity, it follows, that if we but manage it as we ought, we may improve it into an infinite good, because an infinite good may be purchased with it. And this suffices to shew, it is a treasure of inestimable value. But if we farther consider, that the possession of this inestimable treasure is wholly uncertain, and cannot be secured to us by any power under heaven, even for one single day, as being liable to all the accidents to which man's life is exposed; it is plain we cannot, without manifest folly, and the hazard of losing all, neglect the improvement of those precious moments, whereof we are actually in possession. For if we esteem those little better than fools, who wilfully let slip an opportunity of any considerable temporal advantage, because the like may perhaps never be offered again; how great a folly must we then judge those guilty of, who having it in their power to

lay up treasure for eternity, either trifle away the opportunity that is given to them, or employ it to their own infinite prejudice, when at the same time, they are not only uncertain how soon it may be taken from them; but are also sure, that when it is once lost, it is never more to be recovered! This certainly is a folly not to be paralleled, and as far beyond all example now, as the fatal consequences of it will be without remedy hereafter. Oh, what a stabbing thought it is to the damned souls in hell, to reflect that *time will be no more!* A thousand daggers would not half so sensibly stab as this one single thought. It is the everlasting *worm*, that gnaws them without intermission, and gives a double sting to all their torments.

Consider, therefore, that time, if it be managed as it ought, is the richest jewel we possess; that the continuance of it is wholly uncertain; that at best we cannot hold it very long, and when it is once lost, it is lost for ever. Whence, we must conclude, according to my second inference, that as the time present, of which alone we are secure, challenges our highest value, so we ought to manage it to the best advantage of our souls, both in order to redeem, as well as we can, what is yet to come, as to make it fully answer all the great ends, for which it is to be bestowed upon us.

But since life is not only uncertain, but may also end in a sudden death, there remains a third inference to be drawn particularly from this consideration; and it is our Saviour's own inference contained in these words: *Watch ye, therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour*. We ought, therefore, to be so watchful over ourselves, as never to be unprovided. For though there be no fence against a sudden death, yet every Christian may secure himself against an unprovided one, since every one has it in his power to live so as to be always prepared; whereas, if he be at any time unprepared, he exposes himself to all the fatal consequences of a sudden death, because it may happen to him, whilst he is in that condition. For which reason our blessed Saviour, as he frequently forewarned his disciples of the suddenness of his future coming, representing it under diverse parables or similitudes, to imprint the more lively idea of it in their hearts, so he generally concluded his discourses relating to that subject with this admonition, *Watch ye, therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour.*

Who would not think, indeed, but that so express an ad-

monition, delivered by Christ himself, nay, and inculcated with such frequent repetitions, should abundantly suffice to cure men of the deepest lethargy, and awake them into the greatest care and watchfulness over themselves? Considering especially the dreadful mischiefs that attend the neglect of it. But, alas! the case is quite otherwise; for is there any thing more directly opposite to the watchfulness required of us than the state of mortal sin! wherein, whoever dies is lost without remedy. And yet how many continue in this unhappy state, willingly and knowingly, I will not say for many days, weeks, or months, but even years together! Nay, are they not as gay and unconcerned under it, as if every thing were as safe and as well as they could wish? O God, what a blindness and infatuation is this! that men who believe there is another world to come, wherein the just will be eternally rewarded, and the wicked eternally punished, should have the boldness to hazard themselves in a state, from which, if death should seize them in it, they must immediately pass to everlasting torments!

What is it that makes men run thus desperately upon their own eternal ruin? How comes this contradiction in their nature, that being such lovers of themselves, they are at the same time such enemies to their own true happiness? How comes it that, hating and flying above all things whatever is painful, they are not awed with the fear of *hell-fire?* Is it the hopes of atoning for all by a future repentance? Alas! how many have been deceived and utterly lost that way? How many have we either personally known or heard of, who, depending upon the like presumptuous hope, have at length been either hardened in sin before they came to die, or suddenly cut off in the midst of all their disorders? For truly to run on in a wilful course of sin, upon a project of making all scores clear by an after-repentance, looks so like laying a design to baffle the divine justice, and get Heaven by a cheat, that God seems, as it were, bound in justice to defeat the wicked policy of such insolent sinners, by disappointing their presumption, and refusing them the mercy, which they abused, into an encouragement of sin.

The book of Judges furnishes me with an historical passage, very applicable to my present purpose. It is the relation of the tragical end of Sisera, king Jabin's general, who having been for about twenty years the scourge of

God upon the Israelites, was marching against them at the head of a formidable army. The Israelites, in this their distress, had recourse to God's mercy; who, hearing their prayers, ordered them to meet their enemy with a body of ten thousand men, under the command of Barach.

Sisera, whose army was much superior in number, and flushed with a long course of prosperous success reckoned surely upon the victory. But he found his death where he thought to meet a triumph; for the battle was no sooner begun, but God struck his whole army with a panic fear, and general consternation; insomuch, that Sisera himself, being also seized with terror, betook himself to flight, whilst the Israelites broke in upon and destroyed his whole army.

As Sisera was thus endeavouring to save himself by flight, a woman named Jabel offered him her house for sanctuary, which he willingly accepted of; for he thought himself out of danger. Wherefore, being much fatigued, he desired some refreshment, drank heartily, and laid himself down to sleep. But it cost him very dear; for Jabel perceiving him fast asleep, struck a nail through his head, fastened him to the ground, and delivered up his body to Barach, who was in pursuit of him.

This is a lively figure of the unhappy end of but too many sinners. They are God's enemies, and as I may say, at open war against him; he permits them to prosper in this life, and his patience and long forbearance, instead of moving them to repentance, makes them grow insolent, and flatter themselves with a false security; in this condition they *drink iniquity like water;* they fall into a lethargic sleep, and their hearts are, as it were, nailed to the earth. God's wrath is in the mean time in close pursuit of them; death suddenly overtakes them, and delivers them up to the divine justice. And so those miserable wretches are at length awakened by the scorching flames of hell, whom neither the advice of friends nor ghostly father, nor God's secret inspirations, nor the loud thunder of his threats, could awake, whilst they were yet in a condition to prevent the fatal blow by a timely repentance.

Oh, let their misfortunes be at least a warning to us. Let their past follies be our instruction. It is better to grow wise at the expense of others, than by our own experience. Nay, if we should tread in their footsteps, and

miscarry the same way, our folly will be the more unpardonable, in suffering ourselves to be shipwrecked upon a rock, which has so many marks set upon it. Oh, if any of those miserable souls, who are now burning in the flames of hell, could but obtain, with all their tears and bitter sufferings, the bare remainder of this very day, what price, what value would they set upon it! How solicitous would they be not to let one moment of it slip unprofitably out of their hands! And why then will we not resolve to take the same method! Why will any one be so bent upon his own destruction as to run on blindly in a course, which brought them, and will at length bring him, to everlasting misery and torments? For since the same means tend naturally to the self-same end, can any one pretend to act the same unhappy part, as they did, and be in no danger of being involved in the same misfortune? Can he presume to go to Heaven, by walking in that path which brought them to Hell? Or has he power of life or death more in his hands than they had? Is he not liable to the same accidents as they, and may not death surprise him, as it did them?

You will say, perhaps, it is true, it is not impossible but you may die suddenly. However, since this happens but to few, it is more probable you will have warning to prepare yourselves beforehand. But do we argue at this wild rate, when any temporal concern is at stake? You all know very well, that in securing land or money, all accidents possible are nicely considered, and the very same measures and precautions taken, as if it were certain that they would happen. And why then should we be less cautious in the business of our eternal salvation! Why will we put it to an hazard at all, when we have it in our power to secure it absolutely! For allowing it to be less probable, it is possible, at least, we may die suddenly. And is not that enough, considering what lies at stake! Is not that, I say, enough to oblige us to take the safest course we can to prevent the fatal consequences of it in case it should happen. For whatever is possible, though barely possible, may absolutely happen; and if it should happen while we are in sin, let us reflect seriously what the consequence will be. Because if what we hazard by being in a state of sin were either of small moment, or being once lost might be again recovered, the case would be much altered. But we must consider, that the thing we expose to doubtful event, being in that

state, is not only of the highest value imaginable, and surpasses infinitely all the treasures of this world, but if we once lose it, the loss is irreparable; nay, over and above, the miseries we hazard to throw ourselves into, are inexpressible, and without remedy. And therefore of whatever nature the cause may be, that can bring such a misfortune upon us, whether probable or barely possible, it is a madness to be ever unprepared for it.

I shall therefore repeat once more the important admonition of Christ, which we must consider as addressed to ourselves: *Watch ye, because you know not the day nor the hour.* Let no man depend either upon youth or health; for neither youth nor health can afford any security against the stroke of death. We may be in perfect health to-day, and dead to-morrow. Nay, many thousands have been in perfect health the very hour or moment before they fell into hell-fire. But if we desire an infallible security against all possibility of being surprised by death, nothing can procure us that happiness but a well ordered conscience, and the friendship of Almighty God. For whoever enjoys that blessing, may indeed die suddenly, but cannot be surprised by death, as being always in a readiness for it.

FIFTH ENTERTAINMENT.

DIFFICULTIES ATTENDING A DEATH-BED REPENTANCE.

Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day. Eccles. v. 8.

From what has hitherto been said concerning the uncertainty of the time and other circumstances of death on the one hand, and the many dangers and sudden accidents to which we live exposed on the other, it appears plainly that they, who continue a custom of living in a sinful state, run a very great hazard of either dying without any preparation at all, or at the best of being reduced to the last shift of depending wholly upon that preparation which their last sickness will allow them, and which we usually call a *death-bed repentance*; which being generally looked upon as a most dangerous after-game, in a concern of the highest nature, shews the importance of the advice dictated by the Holy Ghost in these sacred words, *Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day.*

Here then is the proper place to examine, what judgment we ought to make of the repentance of a dying man; that is, whether a person who has neglected the means of salvation in time of health, and run on in a course of sinful practices till he falls into his last sickness, be then in any tolerable condition to accomplish the great work of a sincere reconciliation to God.

However, I am far from intending either to extenuate the power of God's *grace*, or set bounds to his *mercy*. For I know that neither the one or the other is to be measured by our short line. His *grace* can change the most corrupt heart in an instant, and his *mercy* never rejects a heart truly changed. And for that reason the most profligate sinner upon earth, though reduced to the very last extremity, ought never to despair. Because he knows not but the same infinite goodness that received a thief at the last gasp into favour, may also be moved to have compassion on him in that extremity.

The question, therefore, is not whether a person, reduced to these unhappy circumstances, is bound to hope in God's mercies, and do what he can to be reconciled to him; for this admits of no dispute; because, though he has lived an unchristian life, he is bound to do his best to prepare himself for a christian death. But since the preparation for such a death cannot be without a sincere *love of God*, and a true *hatred of sin*, both which must be the effect of *grace*, the whole question is reduced to this one single point, viz. whether a person who has always lived a stranger to the virtues of *repentance* and the *love of God*, and being accustomed for many years to resist the motions of grace, will in his last sickness be favoured with such an extraordinary assistance, as will enable him in that state of terror, pain, and anguish, to work a total change in the disposition of his soul.

It is very true, the thing is not impossible, because no wound is incurable to the omnipotent hand of God, and therefore ought not to be despaired of by the unfortunate party who has run the hazard of it. But as it is a heinous crime to despair at any time of God's mercy, so it is the highest strain of madness in any person to lay beforehand a design of depending upon an extraordinary grace, and reduce himself to a state, in which nothing under such a blessing can save him. My business then at present is to

shew, that a death-bed conversion, after a sinful life continued to a person's last sickness, is nothing less than the effect of an extraordinary grace, and by consequence not to be depended on.

To make it appear that the conversion of a sinner upon his death-bed, is the effect of an extraordinary grace, it will be requisite to let you know what I mean by an extraordinary grace. I say, then, that an extraordinary grace is that which is bestowed without the use of the ordinary means ordained by God for the obtaining of it; because, though all grace whatsoever be a pure gift of God, he rarely bestows the grace of a total and sincere conversion, but on those who employ the means ordained by him to dispose themselves for it. So that when a sinner is converted, without the previous use of those means, his conversion is extraordinary, and by consequence the effect of an extraordinary grace.

Now, then, to shew that a death-bed repentance is a conversion of this kind, we must examine two things: 1. What are the ordinary means of a sinner's conversion. And, 2. Whether a dying man be in a condition to put these means in practice; for if he be not, it is evident he has nothing but an extraordinary grace to depend upon. As to the extraordinary means of a sinner's conversion, they are mostly reduced under these four heads, of *prayer*, *spiritual reading*, *consideration*, and the use of the *sacraments*. For let us suppose a person yet in perfect health, should, after having lived in an habitual practice of vices, apply himself to a spiritual director, to consult with him the means of saving his soul, what method would he advise him to? It is not to be doubted but he would, in the *first* place, exhort him to retire for some time, at least as much as would be possible, from company and worldly business, in order to get leisure and opportunity to pour forth his soul before God in the exercise of *prayer*.

2*dly*. He would advise him to join frequent *consideration* with spiritual reading; and all this by way of preparatory exercise, to work him by degrees into a hearty detestation of his life past, and dispose him for the benefit of the *sacraments*.

And to shew how necessary it is to use this method in the case supposed, we need but compare the condition of a soul corrupted with a long habit of sin, with that of a person la-

bouring under an ill habit of body. For as in this case no skilful physician will pretend to cure the party concerned in a dose or two, but will oblige him to enter into a regular course of physic, and prescribe him an uniform method of exercise and diet, by means whereof the mass of blood may by degrees be corrected, and the cause of the distemper removed; so in the case of a soul all over vitiated with sin, a few doses of spiritual physic will profit but little; but a continuance and regular course of remedies is necessary.

It is true, if the sacraments worked their effect without any previous dispositions on the part of the penitent, a few minutes would do as well as many months or years: for then whoever had but time enough to confess, and have his absolution pronounced before the breath went out of his body, would die in the state of salvation. But the case is quite otherwise. There are preparatory dispositions, essentially necessary to qualify the penitent for the grace of the sacraments. For the heart must be truly changed, and the will effectually turned from the irregular *love of creatures*, to the *love of God* above all things.

Now, this is a difficult work, and requires both time and application, more or less, in proportion to the malignity of the distemper, and the root it has taken. For grace works by degrees like nature, and as it usually hides itself under the operation of mere natural causes, so it conforms itself, for the most part, to their way of operating, and seldom brings any thing to perfection on a sudden. And, therefore, when God Almighty mercifully designs to recover an old sinner from the ill state he is in, the first disposition he usually gives him, is to inspire him with an earnest desire of his cure; because the desire of any good, naturally spurs us on to procure the means in order to it. But though this desire, which is the first step towards a sinner's conversion, be ever so hearty, it is usually very imperfect for some time as to its motive; being for the most part wholly influenced at first by mere selfish considerations, such as are the uneasiness of a troubled conscience, the apprehension of God's judgments, the fear of hell-fire, and the like. And all this may be without any *hatred of sin*, for its own sake, that is, purely as it is an *offence to God*.

However, Almighty God makes use of this servile fear, in order to alarm him into a concern and solicitude about the means to shake off the burden that oppresses him, and to

prevent the evils wherewith he is threatened. This concern and solicitude about the means of his cure, obliges him to have recourse to his spiritual physician, and follow his directions as to the method of praying, reading, meditating, and the like. By often reading and thinking upon christian truths, lively ideas of them are insensibly formed, and deeply fixed in his mind. His understanding receives daily new light; his eyes are opened by degrees, and begin to see the vanity of worldly pleasures: the grievousness and enormity of sin; the infinite goodness of God; his love in having sent his only Son to deliver him from the bondage of sin and slavery of the devil; his unwearied patience in having borne so long with him, and unspeakable mercy in not having cut him off in the midst of his disorders, but still inviting him to repentance.

These considerations, as they sink deeper and deeper into his mind, work proportionably upon the will. His heart is affected with them, and takes a new bent. The love of the world, and its sinful pleasures, goes off insensibly, and a better love enters in by the same degrees. What was at first begun upon motives of mere servile fear, he now carries on upon higher considerations. His heart is softened into compunction, his soul is sensibly afflicted with the thoughts of having lived so long an enemy to God. He laments his misfortune in having so often offended his infinite goodness. He pours himself forth in affections of love, admiration, and thanksgiving; detests his past sins, resolves to avoid all the occasions of them, makes hearty purposes of amendment; is ready to submit to any penitential works to satisfy the divine justice, and with these happy dispositions approaches to the sacred tribunal, in order to receive the infinite blessing of reconciliation with his heavenly Father.

Thus we see what are the ordinary means appointed by God for the beginning, improving, and perfecting the great work of a sinner's conversion; and the degrees through which he usually passes in making his advances towards it. Now let us consider, whether a person that has neglected all these means in time of health, and run on to his very last sickness in all his accustomed disorders and habits of sin: whether, I say, he be then in any tolerable condition to put them in practice. For if he be not, he has nothing but an extraordinary grace to depend upon, as I have already said.

And *first*, as to the duty of *prayer*, I only desire any one

to reflect how little he is able to perform in that kind, if he be but under some uneasiness of mind, or a little out of order with the head-ach, or any other trivial indisposition. And how then can we be so senseless as to imagine, that a person seized with a mortal distemper, should be capable of praying with any tolerable attention! for what comparison is there between a slight indisposition, which only effects some one particular part, and a mortal distemper, which usually puts the whole body into a violent ferment, and spreads an universal uneasiness and anguish over every part of it. It is evident, that the one must be by many degrees a greater hindrance than the other, to any business that requires thought and presence of mind. And, therefore, since we find by experience that the infirmity of the spirit is so great, that it is apt to be overcome even by the lesser opposition of the body, there is but little reason to presume it will have strength enough to bear up against obstacles that are without all comparison greater.

But as a person in his last sickness is but in a very ill condition to *pray* as he ought, so is he much less capable of reading; the benefit whereof, and the influence it has upon a sinner's conversion, is sufficiently known by experience. But this point is so clear that it needs no proof. For to put books into a dying man's hand is a thing without example. And here we find him under the greatest disadvantage possible, in being deprived of one of the principal helps to salvation; it being this exercise that should furnish him with proper subjects for consideration, and such reflections, as might insensibly work his soul into a truly penitential disposition, and lead him through all the degrees of a solid conversion.

But this, you will say, may in some measure be supplied by others reading to him. I own something of this may be allowed; but then, how many hindrances are usually intervening in a person's last sickness to obstruct the fruit of it! As frequent visits of friends, the attendance and tears of relations about the sick man's bed, which usually affect him more sensibly than the most moving spiritual lectures. Then doctors and apothecaries must frequently be sent for; and the nurse is every now and then busy about him, and telling him that too much reading may hurt his head, or hinder his repose, and the like. So that in the winding up of the bottom, all the reading to help him will

amount to no more than some unconnected scraps of spiritual lectures, which, though not altogether unuseful to such pious souls as only stand in need of some little helps to stir up their hearts, already well disposed, and revive the pious ideas that have ever been familiar to them, will, I fear, prove to be of very little use to those who are yet full of worldly passions, all over corrupted with habits of sin, and stand in need of the most powerful remedies to work an effectual cure.

However, suppose the hindrances from abroad should not be so great as they are here represented, are not the pains of a dying man alone sufficient to hinder him from receiving any considerable impression from what is said or read to him at that time? For how should he receive impressions from what he cannot attend to? Or how should he be capable of any serious attention, when all his thoughts are forcibly drawn another way? Now, is not this the case of those who are under any violent pain? It is doubtless so. For it is the proper nature of pain to divert the soul from all other objects, and draw her whole application to itself. Hence it is, that *praying*, *reading*, and *meditating*, are exercises that cannot be well performed, but when the body is in some measure at ease, because all these exercises require a composure and presence of mind; and nothing affects the mind more immediately, either for its advantage or disadvantage than the disposition of the body; so that if the body be disturbed with pains, it immediately communicates its disturbances to the mind; and a mind disturbed can scarce think of any thing but the cause of its disturbance.

Now then since it is evident, that the circumstances of a dying man are such as unqualify him in a great measure for all the preparatory exercises that are the ordinary means to dispose him for the sacrament of reconciliation, does it not manifestly follow that the conversion of a sinner, under these unhappy circumstances, can be nothing less than the effect of an extraordinary grace? The consequence is clear and undeniable. Because, where ordinary means fail, nothing but an extraordinary power can supply the defect. And I leave you now to judge, whether a sinner has any reason to presume, before-hand, that God will in his last extremity favour him with a conversion of that nature.

The word of God has forewarned us not to depend upon it. I shall only quote St. Paul, who, writing to the Corinthians, lays down this general maxim, *That the end of sinners will be according to their works.* He repeats it again in his epistle to the Galatians, ch. vi. where he tells them, that every man shall *reap* as he has *sown.* Which imports the same thing, nay, expresses it in a most significant metaphor. *Be not deceived,* (says he,) *God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. He that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption; but he that soweth in the spirit, of the spirit shall reap life everlasting,* Gal. vi. 7, 8. So that, according to the rule of St. Paul, men generally die as they lived; and there is but too much reason to judge of the success of the one by the method of the other.

It is true, there is scarce any general rule without an exception. But the whole body of the Old and New Testament affords but one single instance, that looks favourably upon death-bed penitents, I mean the conversion of the thief upon the cross; which was doubtless the effect of an extraordinary grace. And St. Austin, to prevent all presumption on that score, has marked out so many material circumstances, which favoured the conversion of that happy sinner, and are altogether foreign to the case before us, that is, of those who drive off their repentance in hopes of a like mercy, that I fear the example will afford them but little encouragement. His words are these:

"Dearly beloved, lest perhaps the sudden happiness of the believing thief on the cross should make any of you too secure and remiss; lest any one should say in his heart, my guilty conscience shall not trouble me; my sinful life shall not make me sad, because I see a thief obtained the pardon of all his sins in a moment: we must consider in that thief, not barely the shortness of his faith and confession, but the greatness of his fervour, and the circumstances of time, when even the perfectest were staggering. The Devil inspires you with this security to bring you to ruin. For he deceives himself, and makes a jest of his own damnation, who, persisting in sin, imagines God will assist him in his last extremity. The happy thief, of whom I have spoken, neither designedly staved off from time to time the business of salvation, nor fraudulently forecasted the last moments of life for the cure of his soul; nor resolved be-

fore-hand, to hazard all his hopes upon one desperate cast, at the hour of death; neither had he any knowledge of religion, or of Christ, before that time: For had he had any, it is probable he would have been amongst the first of the apostles who was first in the kingdom of Heaven."

Thus St. Austin—and we may gather freely from his words, what his thoughts were of death-bed penitents, since he will not allow them to be upon equal footing with one, whose life had been notoriously scandalous, and whose conversion was undoubtedly the effect of an extraordinary grace. But let that be as it will, it is certain that an extraordinary event is no precedent in any case whatsoever. For who would, for example, be so mad as to throw himself into the sea, because some few have in the late danger been preserved from drowning? or leap into the fire, because some have escaped without being burnt? As, therefore these extraordinary deliverances are no encouragement to any one to venture his life, upon the bare hopes of such a preservation, so neither ought the example of the penitent thief, embolden any one to hazard the eternal life of his soul, upon the hopes that an extraordinary grace will come in to his assistance in the last extremity.

Let us, therefore, all resolve to put in practice this excellent advice of the pious *Thomas-a-Kempis: Do now, my dearest brother, do now whatever thou art able to do.* Now, whilst thou art in perfect health; now, whilst the sun of grace and mercy shines yet bright upon thee, *for the night cometh when no man can work,* John ix. 4. It is well, if in our last sickness we shall be able to maintain the ground we got whilst we were in health. It is well if we can then support ourselves under all the trials incident to that condition, by the stock of virtue we have laid up before-hand. But let us never flatter ourselves with vain and groundless hopes of doing great matters, at a time when we are not only of ourselves the most unfit for it, but the devil is most active to put all manner of obstacles in our way; for he knows we are then at our last cast, upon which our eternal happiness depends, and will therefore employ his utmost skill and malice to procure our ruin.

Say not that repentance never comes too late; for though it be beyond all question, that a true repentance is never too late; yet a late repentance, as St. Austin tells us, is seldom a true one. Because it is much to be suspected, that mere

servile fear, or self-love, has a greater share in the motive of it than the love of God. It is to be feared, that such a repentance is like the trouble and remorse of a malefactor led to execution, who is sorry for having followed a course of life which has brought him to an untimely and shameful end.

I heartily wish it may prove otherwise, to those who will have the misfortune to put it to the trial: and though, in reference to any particular person, charity obliges us to hope favourably, yet I cannot hinder my fears from prevailing, when there appears nothing but a mere death-bed repentance to ground my hope upon. But when a sinner repents, being yet in perfect health, and applies himself seriously to the methods proper for his cure; when it is evident he resolves to quit sin, before the power of sinning is just ready to leave him: Oh! such a repentance has a favourable aspect, and yields a solid ground to build our hopes upon. Such a repentance will be a comfort to us at the hour of death; as being the most assured pledge we can have, that our heavenly Father regards us with an eye of mercy, and has a blessing in store for us.

SIXTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE DECEITFULNESS OF A DEATH-BED REPENTANCE.

God is not mocked, for what things a man shall sow those also shall he reap. Gal. vi. 7.

In my last discourse, I represented at large the difficulties that attend a death-bed conversion. But since the seeming piety and devotion of some death-bed penitents, who after a wicked life have in appearance died the *death of the just*, has given a kind of credit and reputation to the most dangerous cheat the Devil can invent to ruin souls, it will not be amiss to say something concerning those fair outward appearances of repentance, which many well-meaning persons, out of an abundance of mistaken charity, are apt to judge too favourably of, and miscall *dying very happily*. They see a poor sick man, confessing and bewailing his sins, imploring God's mercy, and receiving the last sacraments, with the same sensible remarks of a truly contrite and humble heart, as the most fervorous christian could do; and conclude immediately he has made a happy end. Perhaps he has: nay, it is beyond all question, if his repentance

was hearty and sincere. But all is not gold that glitters; and there is a large difference between the appearance and reality, the ceremony and substance of repentance.

It is true, we are allowed to have favourable thoughts even of the most profligate sinners, as long as there is any reasonable encouragement to ground our hopes upon. But charity has its bounds, and is to be governed by prudence as well as other virtues. A mere death-bed conversion, though attended with circumstances the most favourable in appearance, ought always to be suspected, nay, marked as a dangerous rock, to be avoided by all who have a serious concern to secure their soul's salvation. And though it may be allowed to afford some degree of hope in favour of the party concerned, it never ought to be magnified into an encouragement for sinners, to hazard their eternal interest upon so weak a bottom. My present design then is to lay before you the uncertainty and deceitfulness of those outward marks of devotion, and repentance, which are apt to mislead men into an over-favourable opinion of a death-bed conversion; and this shall be the subject of this Entertainment.

I told you in my last discourse, that a solid conversion requires a true change of the heart, according to the word of God, *Be converted to me in your whole heart.* Now the heart is said to be changed, when it changes its principal love. As for instance, when the love of God becomes predominant, instead of the love of the world and its sinful pleasures, the heart is truly changed, because its prevailing love is not the same as it was before.

Hence it follows, *first*, That the heart alone is the seat of repentance, because it is the seat of love; and, *secondly*, That sighs and tears, confessions of sins, acts of contrition formed by word of mouth, and verbal protestations and purposes of amendment, are but the *surface* and *outside* of repentance, and not the *substance* of it: Because all these are consistent with a heart wholly unchanged, and may have nothing but mere *self-love*, *servile fear*, or motives *purely human*, for their foundation; though, when the heart is truly changed, they are the usual marks and effects of it.

But, because examples are often more convincing, and make a deeper impression than the most solid reasons, let the case of King Antiochus, as it is represented in the second book of Maccabees, serve for an instance of this truth. The exorbitant pride and avarice of this prince, had pushed

him on to commit all manner of injustice and barbarities upon the Jews; but the divine vengeance overtook him at last, as he was marching in all haste towards Jerusalem, with a full intent to lay the city in ashes, and massacre all its inhabitants. For, whilst he was thus breathing nothing but fire and desolation, he was suddenly seized with a violent pain in his bowels, which tortured him beyond expression; and soon after he received a mortal bruise with a fall from his chariot, which soon reduced him to the last extremity.

And here his eyes were opened, and becoming sensible that the wrath of God was kindled against him for his enormous crimes, and particularly the outrages and inhumanity he had committed in Jerusalem, he gave such marks of a sincere repentance, that had not the word of God itself informed us of the truth, we might have canonized him for an illustrious penitent. For, in the first place, he acknowledged the hand of God in the punishment inflicted on him. 2. He owned the justice of it. 3. He expressed an entire submission to it. 4. He implored the divine mercy with bitter tears; and in order to obtain it, he promised to atone for his past crimes in such an exemplary manner, as suffices to strike the reader with astonishment. Yet, notwithstanding all his pompous show, and glittering outside of repentance, God, who is the searcher of all hearts, saw no real change in his. For had his heart being truly changed and converted to God, there is no doubt but he would have found the mercy he prayed for; whereas, the word of God pronounces upon him in this terrible manner: *This wicked man prayed God, of whom he was not to obtain mercy.*

Here is a frightful example of a death-bed repentance; but the chief use I intend it for, is to convince you, that we never ought to reckon with any positive assurance, even upon the fairest outward appearances of a conversion, unless there be some other reasons to judge by, that they are the effects of a solid change within: Because all outward appearances are ambiguous and uncertain, and may be either unsound or sincere, according as the principle or motive from whence they proceed. A robber, for example, that is fallen into the hands of justice, may be sorry for the robberies he has committed, because he sees himself upon the point of suffering an ignominious death. A libertine may be very much troubled for the life he has led, because he

finds himself ruined by it, both as to health and estate. So a woman, convicted of dishonesty, may be very sensibly afflicted, because she has rendered herself infamous by it. Now, all these are *penitents* indeed, but they are not *gospel-penitents;* because their sorrow is grounded upon no better motive than interest or self-love; and a *Heathen,* who has never heard of the Christian religion, will repent upon the same score.

In like manner, therefore, a sinner, who sees himself at death's door, and upon the brink of everlasting perdition, may, with the fright of so dreadful a prospect, be easily scared into a violent disturbance and anguish of mind, which will outwardly produce the very same effects as the most perfect contrition. Because, a violent fear of any evil near at hand, cannot but affect the party concerned with a great regret, for having, through his folly, drawn it upon himself. And this inward regret, from whatever cause it proceeds, will naturally force sighs, and tears, and lamentations from him, and make him readily lay hold of the obvious expedients to prevent the horrible mischief that threatens him. For what wonder is it, that a person just ready to sink, should lay hold of any broken plank to save himself.

But all this fair outside of repentance avails but little, when there is nothing but *servile fear* at the bottom of it. For *servile fear* alone, though useful in the beginning, can never work a thorough change in a sinner's heart, nor by consequence dispose him completely for his reconciliation with God. There must be a change of love to qualify him for that blessing, as is generally taught by spiritual writers, and none more clearly than St. Austin, who inculcates it on all occasions, and has laid it down as a fundamental maxim of Christian morality, *that love alone makes the difference between the children of God, and the children of the Devil.* The meaning whereof is, that as the love of sin prevailing in the heart makes us children of the Devil, so the love of justice reigning in the soul constitutes us children of God. For which reason, St. John has also positively declared, that *whoever loves not, remains in death;* and our Saviour being asked, *What is the first commandment in the law?* answered, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, &c.*

Hence it follows, *first,* That then alone a sinner's heart can be said to be truly changed or converted, when it passes

from the love of the one to the love of the other; that is when the love of sin is banished, and the love of God enters into its place. For these two loves, being diametrically opposite to one another, in their very natures, cannot subsist together, but must of course destroy each other.

It follows, *secondly*, That mere *servile fear* is of itself insufficient to destroy the love of sin; because it implies no hatred of it for its own sake, and as it is an offence to God, but merely in regard to the punishment that attends it: Which made St. Austin say, that whoever leaves off sinning for the fear of hell-fire, *is not afraid to sin, but to burn.* Now this was properly the case of Antiochus, who was sorry for his past sins, not because God was offended by them, but because he found himself smart severely for them; and therefore, was not worthy to obtain the mercy he prayed for, though he showed all the outward marks of a sincere repentance. I heartily wish it may not be the case of many death-bed penitents. For, though every repenting sinner, whatever his condition be, is under some degree of uncertainty, as to the principle or motives he acts upon, yet, doubtless, there is much better and more solider grounds to hope favourably of the repentance of one in perfect health, than of him who has deferred it to the last extremity. For of the former we may confidently pronounce, there appears no positive reason to doubt but his conversion is solid and sincere; whereas, of the latter we can only say, it is possible it may be so. And the reason of this difference is,

First, Because he that repents in time of perfect health, renounces sin when he has it in his power to continue in it, and thereby shews that it is a free and voluntary act, and not a forced thing to which he is driven by mere stress of fear. Whereas, we may reasonably suspect, that one who has held on sinning as long as he could, and only discovers a willingness to leave it when he can sin no longer, renounces it, as I may say, not for want of *will*, but *power*.

Secondly, He that resolves upon a change of life, whilst he is in perfect health, and has yet time before him to do penance for his sins, shews a real and sincere disposition to it; but he that drives it off to the very last, and only expresses a desire to do penance, when the time of doing it is just expiring, gives reason enough to suspect, that were his life to be continued to him, doing penance for his sins would be the least part of his business in it.

Thirdly, A penitent in time of perfect health has this great advantage, that though his repentance may, as it usually happens, be influenced at first by mere *servile fear*, he has leisure and opportunity to pass forward, and work his soul into a better disposition, by duly applying himself to the exercises proper to introduce the love of God, and softens his heart into a filial compunction. And since God's grace is never wanting to those who are not wanting to themselves, nor denies his assistance where the natural means provided by him are duly employed, a penitent, that has laid hold of the time and opportunity granted him by God, to put these means in practice to the best of his power, has all the reason in the world to hope, that the work of his conversion, though at first perhaps begun by fear, is at last perfected by love, and built upon a solid foundation.

But the case of a death-bed penitent is quite otherwise, as appears evidently from what I told you in my last discourse: for since his circumstances are such as render the use of the fore-mentioned holy exercises almost utterly impracticable to him, it is very difficult to conceive by what means (without an extraordinary grace) the love of God should get entrance into his heart, especially if we consider to what degree it must needs be hardened against it by long habits of sin; for there are two things naturally requisite to make a rational creature change his natural love: *first*, a sufficient motive to induce him to it; and *secondly*, a due application of that motive. For let a motive be ever so powerful in itself, unless it be duly applied, it can never affect the heart, as every one may find by experience.

Now give me leave to ask, what motive a sinner can have to love God in his last sickness, more than he had all the time he was in health? I am sensible, indeed, that all the motives of *fear* are then far more pressing upon him than at any other time. For whether he reflects upon what is past, or considers what is to come, both the one and the other presents objects only proper to strike him with terror. If he considers his life past, he sees nothing but what looks ominous upon him, and threatens him with everlasting punishment. If he looks before him he sees himself upon the brink of eternity, and an offended judge ready to mount the tribunal to pronounce his doom. Now all these objects are very proper, indeed, to create or increase fear, but not to inspire love.

You will say, perhaps, the consideration of God's infinite goodness, his boundless mercies, and many particular favours already received, and the like, are very strong and powerful motives to love. I own they are so; but why then do not all men love God with their whole heart, since all have these motives to love him? The reason is, because the very strongest motives must be duly applied to work their desired effect, and this can only be done by an attentive and reiterated consideration of them. For how powerful soever the fore-mentioned motives are to enkindle the love of God, it is not, alas! a few distracted thoughts, or passing glances upon them, will immediately inflame the heart! they must be leisurely ruminated upon, and thoroughly digested, that so they may be made to sink deeply into the mind, and then by a gradual progress make their way to the heart: Because, unless the ideas of truth be first well imprinted on the intellect, the heart and will can never be affected with them.

Now all this, humanly speaking, requires not only time, but all the strength, composure, and presence of thought a person is capable of, even in the best state of health; which being, doubtless, much more than can be naturally expected from one disabled with sickness of body, oppressed with pains, and disturbed with excessive fears, we may justly apprehend a death-bed penitent makes for the most part but a very lame business of it, and seldom passes beyond mere *servile fear;* so that, however sincere his repentance may appear outwardly, yet if the root be defective, it is not that *worthy fruit of penance* the gospel requires, but rather like the fruit, which grows near the *dead sea*, fair to the eye, but unsound at heart.

And here I cannot but very much blame the indiscreet charity of those, who are ever ready to pronounce with as much assurance in favour of the death-bed penitents, as if there were no ground for any doubt of their salvation. Oh, (cries one) *with what extraordinary devotion did such a one receive the last sacrament! He was a great libertine, indeed, but I doubt not but he has made a very happy end.* Now, is there not here as good encouragement as can be given to sinners, to hazard all upon a death-bed repentance? Could the devil himself speak more effectually to serve his own purpose? For is not this the obvious consequence to be drawn from it? *You see here is one that has indulged himself in all unlawful pleasures, to the very last, yet*

after all he made a very good end, and died very happily. And why then should we deny ourselves any thing, or undergo the hardship of doing penance for our sins, when heaven can be purchased upon much easier terms? These doubtless are the most obvious and natural inferences men are apt to draw from the fore-mentioned eulogiums of death-bed conversions.

I am sure, at least, the Fathers speak another language, and are far from encouraging us to judge too much on the favourable side in the case of death-bed penitents. I shall omit St. Chrysostom's words, which are very terrible indeed, and only quote St. Austin; "If a sinner (says he) in his last sickness desires to be admitted to penance, and is immediately reconciled, and dies; I own, indeed, we deny him not what he asks, neither do we presume he dies well. If he himself be secure, I am not. For though we administer penance to him, we can give him no security. It is true, I pronounce not that he will be damned; neither do I say that he will be saved. Wilt thou, therefore, be delivered from all doubt, lay hold of what is certain, and depend not on what is uncertain. Do penance whilst thou art in health. If thoudost so, I tell thee thou art secure, because thou hast done penance whilst thou hadst it in thy power to sin. But if thou wilt do penance, when thou canst sin no longer, thou leavest not off sinning, but thy sins leave thee."

These are St. Austin's words; and they suffice to convince us, on the one hand, how far this holy father was from being of the pretended charitable disposition of those who are so ready to magnify death-bed conversions; and to let us know, on the other, how mean an opinion himself had of them. Truly we ought rather to speak with fear and trembling of those who have been so unhappy as to run the risk of so dangerous an after-game, than by indiscreet eulogiums to give a kind of reputation to the cheat, and help to inveigle others into the snare.

But as we ought to be very wary and reserved in this point, so we cannot speak with too much assurance of the happy circumstances of those who have quitted their sins, and done penance in time of health, whatever their lives may have been before. And I heartily wish all may embrace this course, which alone is safe after a sinful life. For heaven has but two gates, *innocence* and *penance;* the former is, I fear, already shut against most of us. All then

we have to do is, to secure the latter as soon as we can; lest, if we drive it off too long, we may come to prosper no better than the *five foolish virgins*, who beginning to trim their lamps when the bridegroom's door was shut, came too late for admittance, and were repulsed with this answer, *I know ye not.* And, therefore, our blessed Saviour concludes the parable with this admonition: *Watch ye, therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour.*

It is certain, no man can tell how soon he may be called upon. He that is now in perfect health, may be seized with a mortal distemper before the end of this month or week. This will certainly happen to many in the world; and we have no security but it may happen to any of us. So that the only assured means to prevent our being reduced to the necessity of a death-bed repentance is, to let no time of health slip from us, but lay immediately hold of it, and improve it to our best advantage. And what comfort will it be to us, in our last sickness, to be interiorly convinced, that to the best of our knowledge nothing has been wanting on our side for the making of our peace with God, and that the great business for which we came into this world is then ready done to our hands, and wants nothing but the finishing stroke to be given to it.

Oh, what a strengthening cordial will this be against the usual terrors of death! With what joy shall we then look back upon the good works we have done, the virtues we have practised, the victories we have gained over our passions, and the voluntary mortifications we have undergone in punishment of our sins! But, on the other hand, what fear and anguish, what trouble, darkness and perplexity of thoughts, will those be seized with, who in their last extremity see themselves void of all solid virtue, oppressed with a heavy load of sins, unprovided for eternity, and under a pressing necessity to undertake a work of the greatest importance imaginable, when dispirited with weakness, pains, and fears, and streightened for time, they neither have the heart to set about it, nor are in any tolerable condition to go through with it! If we could but see what passes in the soul of a wretch in this unhappy condition, it would certainly terrify us from ever hazarding to fall into it; and the sight of a criminal upon the rack would be a spectacle of less horror to us.

SEVENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

OF JUDGMENT.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CAUSE TO BE TRIED AT THE GREAT TRIBUNAL.

We must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ. 2 Cor. v. 10.

Of all the truths of the Christian religion, none is more terrifying than that which is laid before us in these words of St. Paul. Holy Job could never think of it without trembling, *What shall I do,* (says he,) *when the Lord shall come to judge; or when he shall demand an account of me, what shall I answer for myself?* St. Jerome was no less sensibly affected with it, as himself relates; nor could he ever think of it, but he found himself seized with terror, and the impression sunk so deep, that no business could remove it from his thoughts; for whatever he was doing, he imagined he heard the last trumpet sounding in his ears, *Rise, ye dead, and come to judgment.* Many other Saints have lived under the same continual apprehensions of it; particularly St Arsenius, who, in his last sickness, declared to those that were about him, that since his retirement into the desert, he had not passed one day without fear.

And truly it is no wonder that men, who gave themselves leisure to think, and looked farther than the present world, should be terrified with the prospect of a day which was to decide their eternal lot: a day, attended with all the circumstances proper to strike terror into any heart, that will but consider them with due attention. For the saints were not content to allow them a general view or passing glance; but, in order to imprint the ideas of them deeply on their minds, they ruminated distinctly and leisurely upon every circumstance relating to it. They considered the infinite *holiness, wisdom, power,* and *majesty* of the judge before whom they were to appear. They considered the exactness of the scrutiny to be made of every thought, word, and action of their whole lives; the large difference between God's judgments and those of men, the *weighty importance of the cause,* which when once decided would admit of no appeal; and, finally, the *severity* and *rigour of the law,* by which it was to be tried.

By these considerations, often repeated, and thoroughly digested, they kept themselves in the disposition prescribed by St. Paul, *of working their salvation in fear and trembling.* And if all Christians would but follow their method in this point, the face of Christendom would soon be changed, and men would not let loose the reins to all sinful liberties, as if no account were to be given hereafter. This certainly would be the fruit of a frequent and serious consideration of the severe judgment, which every man must undergo immediately after his death. Since, therefore, I have now already gone through all the principal considerations relating to *death*, the order of my subject now calls upon me to speak of this *judgment;* which, containing several truths of great concern, I will now begin with the weighty importance of the cause that is to be decided in it, which shall be the whole subject of this Entertainment.

When a criminal under confinement expects to be tried for his life, if his case admits of any hope, he fails not to use all endeavours possible to prepare himself so, that sentence of death may not be pronounced upon him. He makes all the interest he can, consults the ablest lawyers, studies all his answers to the indictment that will be brought against him, and, in a word, spares no pains or cost to make a good defence.

Now, if any one should ask a person under these circumstances what reason he has to be thus concerned? why he gives himself so much trouble? or to what purpose he throws away so much money? why he will not rather set his heart at rest, and study to divert himself? If any one, I say, should put these questions to him, his answer would doubtless be, that he has reason enough to be concerned, and not to sit idle, when his life is at stake. And without all dispute the answer would be too rational and satisfactory to leave room for any further reply.

Yet, after all, what is this precious treasure called *life*, on which men set so high a value, and seek to preserve at any rate? Holy Job gives this account of it: *Man born of a woman, living a short time, is filled with many miseries. Who cometh forth like a flower, and is destroyed, and fleeth as a shadow, and never continueth in the same state.* And St. James to express the shortness of it, calls it *a vapour that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away.*

This is the valuable treasure we are so fond of, and which nature has so strong an inclination to preserve, and fear to lose, that no business relating to this world is of equal moment with that wherein life is concerned. And hence it is, that the case of a poor criminal expecting to be brought to his trial, to receive his final doom, is by all esteemed a concern of so high a nature, that nothing can be done too much to prevent a miscarriage; and the terror of it affects not only the party concerned, I mean the criminal himself, but all that have any tie, whether of blood or friendship with him, are interested, and solicitous for his deliverance from the danger that threatens him.

Now, if a cause of life and death in this world, be justly esteemed a business of so great a concern, though all that can be lost upon the issue of it be no more than a short and miserable life: who can find words to express, or ideas to conceive, the weighty importance of a cause, wherein the soul's eternal and unchangeable doom is to be determined? For the thing that is at stake in this trial is not, alas! the small remainder of a few months, or years, the poor comfort of a perishable life, or the uncertain enjoyment of a temporal estate, but the interest and final sentence of eternity. *Heaven* and *Hell* are the reward and punishment disputed in it; that is, life and death without end, joys and torments without measure. In a word, all that can be hoped for on the one hand, and all that can be feared on the other, depends upon the happy or unhappy issue of it. Oh, what a weighty concern is this! How inconsiderable and trivial are all things of this world, if put in balance with it.

To give you a clear idea of this truth, I need but compare the *goods* and *evils* of this life with the *joys* and *torments* of the life to come, and shew the infinite disproportion there is between them. For in this life every thing is *mixed;* the enjoyments as well as sufferings of this world have their allays, and nothing is good or bad in the extreme.

First, Its joys are evidently of this nature, since we find that even those, who are esteemed most happy, are seldom or never content. When they have no real evils to trouble them, imaginary ones are called in to supply the place. Something is ever wanting, if not to reasonable desires, at least to satisfy extravagance or humour. They grow weary of what they have, and are uneasy for what they have not. Those goods, from which men measure their very worldly

happiness, want not their evils; their wealth is encumbered with solicitudes and fears; their *honours* expose them to envy and censure; and their *pleasures* are either too short or too long, and so cause either disappointment or loathing. But let them be ever so artfully contrived to prevent both the one and the other, the very thought that they must all end in death, destroys a part of their satisfaction, and suffices alone to cast a damp upon their most refined and heightened joys.

This is the general condition of the *goods* of this life, and its *evils* are of the same *mixed* nature, and have all their peculiar abatements. For if *pain* be the evil men are afflicted with, it is either moderate or violent; if moderate, it is tolerable, and there is no great reason to complain. If violent, it cannot last long. Besides, a good conscience, and the hopes of an eternal repose, sweetens the one as well as the other, and is as a continual feast. So that whilst the body is in pain, the mind may be at ease, and then the comfort is greater than the affliction.

But if *disgrace* be the evil that troubles them, they either deserve it, or not. If not, they suffer innocently, the consciousness whereof is a most solid comfort. But if they have brought upon themselves by any crime, or culpable indiscretion, they may draw a substantial good from the evil they suffer, by submitting humbly to it; and so make their disgrace with men become a step to raise them in the favour and esteem of God.

Lastly, if *poverty* be their cross, they have at least the advantage of being free from the snares and temptations of riches; and the advantage is very considerable, if rightly valued. Besides, if their circumstances be narrow, it is but contracting their desires within the same bounds; and a reasonable content may be found in any state. It is true, they have not the pleasures and conveniences which the rich enjoy, but they are also without the dangers to which their enjoyments expose them. They are likewise without the uneasiness of mind, which all conscientious rich men must needs be under, in regard of the account they must give of their stewardship to God. For they are but in effect his stewards, and will be responsible to him for all abuses committed in their stewardship. Add to this, that the poor are but, by God's appointment, in the very same condition which many thousands have made their voluntary choice, nay, was

chosen by Christ himself, and pronounced by him a *blessed state*. And is not this a solid comfort? But though all other comforts should be wanting, the consideration that death will infallibly put an end to all their sufferings in this world, is one at least that can never fail.

Thus when we see that neither the *goods* or *evils* of this life are without mixtures; its sweetest joys are sprinkled with bitterness, and its bitterest sorrows have an allay of comfort, either present or in reversion. But in the world to come matters are not so. Every thing there is pure and unmixed. All sorrow is banished from Heaven, and in Hell there is no comfort. So that the future state of the soul being once fixed admits of no mean; but is either infinitely miserable, or infinitely happy. Because God being an infinite good, the possession of him cannot but be an infinite blessing, and the loss of him an infinite evil. And hence there is no *discontent* in Heaven, because the blessed souls enjoy whatever they can wish or desire. No *disappointment*, because all their hopes are fully satisfied. No *weariness* or *loathing*, because the object that renders them happy, always is, and always appears the same. Finally, no *fear*, because they know their state to be permanent and everlasting; they possess inestimable *riches*, without solicitude or trouble; they are crowned with *honour* and *glory*, without jealousy or envy; and are incessantly filled with incomprehensible *delights* and *pleasures*, without satiety.

But as the heavenly beatitude is a state made up of all goods every way perfect and complete, so *damnation*, which is the state diametrically opposite to it, is a most frightful aggregation of all imaginable evils, without any mixture of good. For in Hell the soul is deprived of every thing she loves or desires, and condemned to every thing she abhors or fears. She has a violent inclinatien in her nature to be happy, and she knows herself eternally separated from every thing that is capable of contributing to it. She craves after wealth and plenty, and she sees herself stripped naked of every thing, and sunk into the lowest degree of misery and want. She loves honour and esteem, and she is condemned to everlasting confusion and disgrace. In a word, happiness and content, ease and pleasures are the things she most earnestly thirst after, and she is doomed to torments, without any glimpse or shadow of comfort. Torments never to be intermitted, never to he abated, never to end.

Now, from this terrible difference between the condition of things temporal and eternal, and the infinite greatness both of the rewards and punishments of the other world, we may form some idea of the weighty importance of the cause that is to be decided at the great tribunal. For it follows clearly from them, that the importance of it surpasses all concerns even of the highest nature in this world, as much as Heaven is above earth, as much as eternity exceeds a short term of time, or the infinite being of God surpasses all limited and created beings. And therefore, since these have no manner of proportion, it is plain, that all earthly concerns, even those that are attended with the most weighty consequences, are no more than childish toys and trifles, in comparison with the great business that is to be decided hereafter. For whereas, all the business of this life is about things that are neither permanent nor solid in their nature, as I have shewn, we may truly say they are scarce worth our being solicitous about them. But the goods and evils of the other world being infinite and everlasting, the consequence of our succeeding or miscarrying in a cause, which is to give the final determination to our future state, comprehends all whatever a rational and immortal soul can either love or hate, hope or fear, wish or abhor.

And therefore, at whatever moment our souls are summoned to appear before the tribunal of Christ, it will then be irrevocably determined, whether we are to be the happiest or most unfortunate creatures that God can make us. Whether Heaven, with all its infinite joys, or Hell, with all its inconceivable torments, whether delights pure and unmixed, or evils without any shadow of comfort, are to be our everlasting portion. If we be found free from guilt, life without end, joys without sorrow, fulness without satiety, incorruptible riches, immortal honours, and a crown of glory that will never fade, will be our reward. But if we be found guilty of any mortal sin deliberately committed, and not washed off by true repentance, alas! poor wretches, we are then immediately sentenced to be for ever banished from the sight of God, doomed to unquenchable flames, and condemned to all that is dreadful, without any hopes of ever enjoying one moment of ease, relief, intermission, or abatement of our pains. O dreadful judgment, on which the soul's eternal and unchangeable lot depends! Dreadful judgment, after which (allowing only for the temporal

punishment of pious souls not fully purified,) there is no mean to be found, but every thing is infinite, incomprehensible, eternal.

For this reason our Saviour exhorts us, *not to fear those who can kill the body, but only him who, when the body is destroyed, can cast the soul into hell-fire.* For this reason he tells us, *that it profits a man nothing to gain the whole world, if he loses his soul.* Finally, for this reason he commands us to sacrifice an *eye*, *hand*, or *foot*, or whatever is dearest or most precious to us in this life, rather than be hereafter condemned to everlasting flames. And it was undoubtedly the consideration of these terrifying truths which made St. Austin pray to God to be burned, tortured, or cut to pieces here, so he might but be spared hereafter. It was this made the holy martyrs prefer burning gridirons, gibbets, rods, and axes, before the pleasures of this life. And the same motive induced so many holy men and women to renounce all satisfactions of nature, and fly to caves and deserts, to shelter themselves against the terrors and irreparable misfortunes of the day of wrath.

And truly, what wonder is it they should renounce trifles, to secure eternal and substantial good? Or that they should choose to undergo some temporal pains and inconveniences, rather than expose themselves to eternal miseries and torments? For this is no more than acting according to the dictates of reason, which naturally prompts us to give the preference to the greater good, and of two evils to choose the lesser. But what justly challenges our greatest surprise and amazement is, that even those, who would not enjoy one moment's rest, if either life or estate were in danger, should be charmed into a dead sleep, and live on with all the unconcern imaginable, whilst Heaven and eternity are at stake, and in manifest danger of being irreparably lost. This is so monstrous an infatuation, that one would think it were inconsistent either with faith or reason; and yet how many Christians are guilty of it? How many are there that live as if there either were no day of reckoning to come, or the interest depending on it were beneath their concern?

Preserve us, O God, from this fatal blindness. Pierce our hearts with the terrors of thy judgments, and give us so deep a sense of the weighty importance of securing our eternal happiness, that nothing may ever divert us from it.

EIGHTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE RIGOUR OF THE LAW BY WHICH WE ARE TO BE JUDGED.

The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. John xii. 48.

These words of Christ mark out clearly to us the law by which we are to be judged: to wit, the *evangelical law* contained in the four gospels, and other tracts of the New Testament. It therefore concerns us all to be in some measure informed of the nature of this law. For our *all* depends upon it; our eternal lot will be decided by it, and if it finds us guilty, we are all lost for ever. My present design then is to explain to you this important circumstance, both of the *first* and *last judgment*, viz. the rigour of the law by which we are to be judged. And this shall be the whole subject of this Entertainment.

It is related in the tenth chapter of St. Luke, that our Saviour, being consulted by a Jewish doctor concerning the means necessary to salvation, instead of satisfying him with a direct answer, referred him to the law. *In lege quid scriptum est? quomodo legis? What is written in the law? How dost thou read?* giving him thereby to understand, that to save his soul, he only needed to consult the law of God, and do according as it should direct him.

Now, as the laws of civil governments serve to a double purpose, viz. to direct and punish; to regulate the duties of civil life, and convict the offenders against them; so is it in the spiritual kingdom of Christ. God has made us an ample provision of laws, some of which are set down in the moral tracts of the Old Testament, and summed up in the two tables of the decalogue. But these being not only reinforced but explained by Christ, we may truly say, that the gospels, which deliver his sacred doctrine in his own words, and the other parts of the New Testament, which are but comments upon them, contain the whole body of the *Christian law;* that is, of all the *precepts, rules,* and *maxims,* upon which a Christian is bound to model his life.

Whence it follows, that as a Christian is bound to live according to the direction of this law, so will he be hereafter judged, and either saved or condemned by it. The

gospel is his guide, and he must follow it, if he will attain to life everlasting. The gospel is his rule, and if he swerves from it, he must expect to undergo the severity of it. In a word, the gospel is the law he professes, and he must stand or fall by it at the day of judgment. So that this question, *What is written in the law? How dost thou read?* proposed by Christ to the Jewish doctor, will then be pressed home to every Christian. All our thoughts, words and deeds, will be brought to this test, and every article of the indictment against us examined by it. Whatever is found conformable to this law, will be approved and rewarded; and whatever appears contrary to it, will be condemned and punished. In fine, this sentence of our Saviour to the Jews, *The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day*, will be fully made good in relation to every one of us. And happy he, who now lives so up to it, as to be hereafter able to stand the trial of it.

It being therefore certain, that the gospel is the law which is to judge us, let us now enquire into the nature of it, and see whether it will, in any likelihood, prove favourable to our cause, or whether it will not rather increase the terror of the last day. Let any one but apply himself to an attentive consideration of the holy doctrine it contains, and if he be not wholly insensible, he will find himself seized with fear, when he reflects, that at the opening of the books of conscience, all the particulars of his life entered into those sacred registers will be compared with it, and his eternal doom determined by it. For I observe three things in it very terrifying and full of rigour. *First*, we shall be accountable to it for the secrets of our hearts, as well as outward works. *Secondly*, it will have no regard to the corrupt customs and maxims of this world. And, *thirdly*, the duties, of which it will require an account, are mostly such as our corrupt nature has the greatest repugnance to. From these three heads we may easily gather, how little favourable this law is like to prove to the important cause that is to be decided by it. I shall make a few remarks upon each.

First, then, we shall stand accountable to it for the secrets of our hearts, as well as outward works. And whereas human laws restrain only the hand and tongue, but are forced to leave men the freedom of their thoughts, the gospel law will, on the contrary, take as strict a cognizance of what we have thought, as of what we have said or done. Our

desires will be as nicely looked into as our deeds. Our very intentions will be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, and the motives upon which we have acted, as severely examined as the actions themselves. So that what many times is found in substance, and seemingly above all exception, will, in this court of judicature, be found vitiated in its principle or root: Here all the subtle insinuations of pride, and secret contrivances of self-love, will be narrowly searched into and pronounced upon. Here a strict enquiry will be made, of how much has been done merely for interest, how much to gratify some particular humour, or to gain esteem or applause. And whatever shall be found to have been influenced by these or other such human respects, though it was highly valued and admired in this world, will be disapproved and censured by the law that is to judge us.

But of all the wicked stratagems of corrupt nature, none will be more severely punished than the *hypocrisy* of those who, under the mask of zeal for religion, have covered the blackest designs of ruining the reputation of their real or reputed enemies, by malicious insinuations, or accusing them of crimes whereof they were holy innocent. And I shall only add, that whoever finds his conscience charged with any part of this unchristian practice, though his intention was never so seemingly pious (for a good intention can never justify a bad deed) cannot hope for mercy at the day of judgment, without first making a reparation answerable to the injustice he has committed.

Secondly, This law will have no regard to the usual plea of this world from *custom* or *example:* I mean in favour of such practices as interfere with or encroach upon any branch of the doctrine of the gospel. For truly if custom should hereafter be allowed to put in its plea, and influence the decision of our cause, I shall be obliged to own that many of those, who in all likelihood will make but a very unfortunate business of it, would have as fair a prospect of succeeding as they could wish, and doomsday would not be so frightful by many degrees as it is every where represented. For excepting only enormous crimes, what would not custom apologize for? All modish vices would find shelter under its protection. *Pride, idleness, intemperance, immodesty in dressing, revenge* and *prodigality*, would not want an advocate to plead their cause; and, in a word, all

fashionable extravagancies would have good warrant to succour them.

But, alas! this plea will be out of doors at the great day of assizes. It carries indeed a great sway now, and has a power which few are able to resist. But it ends with this world: nor will its laws be in the least consulted by the supreme arbiter of life and death. So that whoever has nothing but *custom* or *example* to allege for his justification, will make but a very weak defence.

Hence, in the world to come, it will be to very little purpose to say, *I have done as others did before me. I followed the common practice. I thought it necessary to conform myself to custom.* For though this be a plausible cover now, and carries a fair shew of reason for any thing that is not grossly scandalous, it will not satisfy hereafter; and the general answer to all these specious pretences will be: *What is writ in the law? How dost thou read?* that is, *have thy actions been conformable to the gospel?* This, I say, will be the general answer to all the pretended reasons for customs and compliances, wherewith corrupt nature seeks now to put a gloss upon the works of self-love and pride. For when God comes to judge, this varnish will be taken off, and every thing be made to appear in its proper colours. The *evangelical law* will then have its full course, in spite of all the contrary customs of the world; and nothing will find approbation, but what can stand the trial of it.

Nay, *custom*, the great law-maker of this world, will be so far from helping us out at the day of judgment, that our having conformed to it, in contradiction to the gospel, will be a considerable article against us; as is evident both from the many *woes* pronounced by Christ against the *world*, and the repeated prohibitions recorded in holy writ against conforming to it. *Be not conformed to this world*, says St. Paul; and *whoever*, says St. James, *will be a friend of this world, becomes an enemy to God.*

Oh! how many worldly Christians, who have nothing but custom to plead for them, will be condemned by this very maxim of the evangelical law! How will they stand confounded, when they find all their fine reasons of pretended decency and compliance rejected as frivolous, and no other plea admitted, but what is grounded upon the conformity of their actions to the law they swore at the font! And yet this will certainly be the unhappy case of all such

lovers and admirers of the world, as had more regard to its approbation and esteem, than to the law of God demanded of them.

Thirdly, The duties of which it will demand an account, are mostly such as corrupt nature has the greatest repugnance to. This will appear beyond all dispute, if we but reflect, that it will hereafter demand an account of what it now *commands* and *forbids ;* and pronounce upon us according as we have been exact or deficient in performing the one and avoiding the other. Now, whoever will but seriously apply himself to read and study the evangelical law with an unbiassed judgment, and sincere desire to discover the true spirit and meaning of it, will find that the greatest part of its precepts and maxims either oblige us to things from which our nature is very averse, or prohibits things to which it is most strongly inclined. For what is it our nature chiefly *loves* or *hates ?* It loves *honour* and *esteem*, *wealth* and *pomp*, *ease*, *liberty*, and *pleasures ;* and, by consequence, it regards *poverty*, *contempt*, *restraint*, and *suffering*, as its greatest grievances. Now, the gospel not only cries down all the forementioned objects of our inclinations, and preaches up the objects of our aversions, but obliges all its disciples to such duties, as directly thwart nature both in one and the other.

As for instance, what can mortify nature more in its inclination to *honour* and *esteem* than to be bound to imitate the humility of the Cross ? To bear the confusion of confessing our most hidden sins ? To humble ourselves before God and man ? To love and to do good to them that despise, traduce, and affront us ? Yet all these duties are required of us by the law that is to judge us.

Secondly, What can thwart our nature more in its love of *wealth* and *pomp*, than to be bound not to set our hearts and affections upon them, and be in readiness to sacrifice all we enjoy in this world, rather than betray our duty, or offend God mortally ? Yet this we are obliged to by the law that is to judge us.

Thirdly, What can cross nature more in its love of *liberty* and *ease*, than to be under an obligation of improving the talents we have received ? Of being watchful over our senses ? Of bridling the tongue, avoiding the occasions of sin, and being faithful in acquitting ourselves of all the duties of our respective stations and callings ? Yet

we are charged with all these obligations by the law that is to judge us.

Fourthly, and *lastly*, What greater contradiction can there be to our natural propensity to *pleasure*, than *striving to enter through the narrow gate ; gaining the kingdom of heaven by violence ; doing worthy fruits of penance ; hating and denying ourselves ; mortifying the deeds of the flesh by the spirit ; crucifying the flesh with all its affections and lusts ; abstaining from all things to gain the crown :* and, in a word, imitating the serious, laborious, and suffering life of our heavenly pattern, Jesus Christ ? Yet all these duties are in a certain degree required of us by the law that is to judge us. So that nothing is plainer, than that this law obliges us to many duties most disrelishing to nature, and directly opposite to its strongest inclinations. And by consequence, as it now requires them of us, so shall we be hereafter accountable to it for the performance.

The holy Fathers were undoubtedly of this opinion : For they used it for the most part as an argument to convince idolaters, that the planting of the Christian faith was the work of a divine and supernatural power ; and that nothing but the hand of God could ever have carried it on, and brought it to perfection. Now if the doctrine of the gospel suited with the humour of the world, or were agreeable to flesh and blood, the argument had been wholly frivolous : for what need of the hand of God to bring men over to a religion that flattered their inclinations ? What need of a divine and supernatural power to carry on an undertaking, that should meet no opposition in men's nature to hinder its success ? But it being supposed that the Christian doctrine runs counter in many things, both to the received maxims of the world, and the most pressing inclinations of flesh and blood, the argument was unanswerable ; and the holy Fathers using it against the Pagans for that purpose, is an evident proof that this was their idea of it.

Neither were the Fathers alone of this persuasion : but all the saints, whom the church honours as such, and recommends to our imitation, have ever agreed with them in their ideas of the rigour of the gospel ; as the method of their lives, which they formed upon it, sufficiently testifies. For was it not their daily and only business to study to deny and mortify themselves ? Consider but the particulars of

their lives, and you will find it so; for they renounced whatever nature delights in, and made choice of what it had an aversion to. They spent their days in the most laborious practices of penance. They brought their bodies under subjection, and subdued their rebellious passions by praying, watching, fasting, and other austerities. In a word, they engaged themselves in a continual war against all the pleasures, liberties, and satisfactions of this world.

Now what induced the saints, who were the same flesh and blood, and were as sensible both of pleasure and pain as the rest of their fellow-mortals; what induced them, I say, to undertake a course of life so opposite to all the inclinations of nature? It was undoubtedly their persuasion, that whatever they did in this kind was but conformable to the law, whereof they professed themselves disciples, and to which they were to be accountable hereafter. For without this persuasion it had certainly been impossible, that men in their senses, and naturally as great lovers of themselves as the rest of mankind, should ever have made so strange a choice as to prefer sufferings and self-denials to the pleasures and conveniencies of life; and therefore we must either charge the saints with folly and delusion, or conclude the evangelical law, from which they took their measures, is far more severe in its precepts and maxims, than the world seems willing to own: Not that it follows hence, that the gospel obliges all christians to live up to the austerities practised by the saints; but it is above all question, that it obliges them to something that bears a resemblance with it; and that a life, which is a flat contradiction to theirs, and the very reverse of it, neither has the gospel for its pattern, nor will hereafter be able to stand the trial of it.

Thus I have laid before you both the weighty importance of the cause that is to be tried before the great tribunal, and the severity of the law by which it is to be tried: I leave you now to judge, whether we can pretend to act rationally, if we make it not our most serious endeavour to secure a point of such infinite importance on the one hand, and liable to so great a hazard on the other; or whether we ought not to be at least as active, careful, and solicitous in managing this concern, as we should be in case something of very great importance relating to this world were at stake.

Let us then suppose we were now fallen into the hands

of justice, kept under close confinement, and expecting daily to be tried for our lives; what should we do in this case? What measures would be taken? Would we sit down with our arms across, or entertain ourselves with some frivolous amusement till we were summoned to the bar? Should we not rather look about us in time, and busy ourselves in preparing for our trial, by making friends, by consulting some skilful lawyer, by studying our defence, and answers to the evidence that would appear against us? Especially, if we were persuaded, that by taking these precautions we might secure our lives and fortunes, and by neglecting them we should certainly lose both the one and the other.

Now, though the case supposed be but a shadow of the real one, which regards the business of the life to come, yet the measures, we should resolve upon in the one, may be some direction as to what we ought to do in the other. Let us then consider, that we must all one day appear before the *Tribunal of Christ*, to receive sentence of eternal life or death. This world is our prison, whence we must one day go forth in order to our trial in the next. We know not how soon we may be called upon. All we are sure of is, that we must come to it sooner or later. However, during our confinement here below, we may order matters so, that the trial, instead of being a day of terror and confusion, may be a day of joy and honour to us. And how must this be done? by only taking proportionably the same measures, as we would in the case supposed.

Let us then do as much to save our souls, as we would to save our lives, and all will go well. Let us not waste our time in idle or sinful amusements, but make it our principal business from henceforward to prepare for our trial, by *making friends*, by advising with some *skilful lawyer*, and *studying our answers* to the accusations we already know will be brought against us.

The principal person, with whom we must endeavour to make our interest, is our *advocate* and *mediator*, *Jesus Christ*. Let us bewail our sins daily before him, with an humble and sincere repentance. Let us now make him our pattern, and he will not fail to be our friend, even when he comes to be our judge.

2*dly*, We must make an interest with the Saints, and particularly with the Blessed Virgin, by a devout observance

of their feasts, by imitating their virtues, and often imploring their intercession. And, 3*dly*, according to our Saviour's advice, we must *make ourselves friends of the mammon of injustice:* that is, gain the *poor* over to our side, and purchase their prayers by frequent alms. Let us but fee the poor as we would our lawyers, in case we had a considerable law-suit depending, and it will go a great way towards the gaining our cause. Their prayers have a great power with our judge, because they are his representatives here upon earth, and what is done to them for Christ's sake will be accepted, as if it had been done to Christ himself.

We must also consult from time to time some *skilful lawyer*, I mean, some prudent director, whose advice we may depend upon. But then we must take care to state our case fairly to him. For if we use double-dealing, or conceal any thing of moment from him, though he were an angel, we should perish under his hands.

Lastly, We must prepare our answers to the accusations we already know will be brought against us. Now, if we can but make it appear, that we have done *worthy fruits of penance*, this will be an unexceptionable answer to all accusations of what kind soever. Because, all *penitent sinners*, that is, all sinners, though ever so enormous, if they do worthy fruits of penance to expiate their sins past, and begin a new course of life, and persevere in it, have God's own infallible promise of mercy, delivered in these express terms: *When the wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has committed, and does judgment and justice, he shall certainly live, and he shall not die.*

NINTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE INFINITE KNOWLEDGE OF THE JUDGE.

There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; nor hid, that shall not be known. Matt. x. 26.

In the introduction to my first discourse upon *judgment*, I made a short enumeration of the weighty circumstances relating to it, and have already enlarged upon two of them, viz. the importance of the cause that is to be decided in it, and the rigour of the *law* by which it is to be tried. It remains now to say something concerning the character of the judge before whom we are to appear. You all know the

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person is Jesus Christ, true God and true man; and therefore, infinite in all the attributes belonging to the divine nature; as *power*, *knowledge*, *goodness*, *justice*, and *mercy*. Now, if I were to consider him in quality of *redeemer* of mankind, or as he is the *advocate* of sinners, his *infinite mercies* would be a proper subject for me to dwell upon: but since I am now to speak of him only as *judge*, you will not be surprised to hear me deliver such truths, as are more apt to cause terror than comfort.

However, it is a certain truth, that the whole course of this life is a time of *mercy*, and the greatest sinners are capable of receiving the benefit of it to the very last gasp: but after that, we enter into another world, where *justice* takes place, and *every one will receive*, as St. Paul assures us, precisely *according to his works*: I shall therefore, consider three things in the judge before whom we are to appear: 1. His *infinite knowledge*, which nothing can escape: 2. His being the very person whom we offend by every sin we commit: and, 3. His being *infinitely just*. I shall reserve the two latter considerations for my next discourse, and at present speak only of his *infinite knowledge*, which therefore shall be the whole subject of this Entertainment.

A criminal, who is to be tried for his life, is apt to comfort himself in some measure with the flattering hopes, that either the indictment will not be fully proved against him, or that the witnesses may be bought off, or that the judge, whom he has never personally offended, may be moved to compassion, and not proceed against him according to the utmost rigour of the law. But a criminal, who is to have Christ for his judge, cannot comfort himself with any of these flattering thoughts. And nothing but a conscience free from mortal sin can hinder sentence of eternal death from passing upon him.

First, then, all hope of having any thing concealed or palliated is utterly excluded by the *infinite wisdom* and *knowledge* of the divine person who is to be our judge; for as nothing can resist an *infinite power*, so nothing can escape the penetration of an *infinite knowledge*; which though it be in itself above our comprehension, it is however necessary to form the best idea of it we can, since without it we cannot rightly apprehend how terrible a thing it is for a criminal to appear before, and have his eternal lot decided by a judge of that character. Now, though no-

thing that is *infinite* can be fully comprehended by us, yet some imperfect idea may be formed of the *infinite knowledge* of God, by comparing it with the knowledge of created intellectual beings, or by considering it in its effects, and with relation to the government of this world.

As to the knowledge of created intellectual beings, though that of the *angels*, who are pure intellectual spirits, be very great, and surpasses by many degrees the largest capacity of human understanding, yet being *created*, it is by consequence *limited*. The eternal wisdom has set bounds to it as to the ocean, and said, *Thus far it shall go, and no farther:* Nay, though God should every moment to the world's end, create angels still perfecter in knowledge, yet the perfectest of them would still say, with St. Michael, *quis ut Deus? Who is as God?* Because a knowledge, which is *infinite*, that is, unlimited and without bounds, cannot be measured by one that is limited. A single drop of water has a proportion to the whole ocean: God perfectly knows what the proportion is, and can make an exact enumeration of the number of drops which suffice to compose that vast body of waters; because both the one and the other are limited, and have their bounds precisely measured out: But the distance between a limited and unlimited perfection, is always *infinite*, and to whatever perfection the knowledge of a creature may be raised, it is not so much as the smallest drop of water to the whole ocean, if compared to the infinite wisdom and knowledge of God.

However, our idea of it will be still raised higher, if we consider it in its effects, and with relation to the government of the world: Consider therefore this vast bulk of the terrestrial globe, and the air that encompasses it: The earth inhabited by millions of souls, adorned with a prodigious variety of trees, plants, and flowers, and affording nourishment both above ground, and within its bowels, to innumerable sensitive creatures: the seas, lakes, and rivers stocked with fish, and the air with fowl: Then consider again, that although this prodigious body of the universe has already subsisted for many ages, yet it continues still as vigorous in all its productions, and as regular and uniform in passing yearly through all that admirable succession and variety of seasons, as it was in the very beginning of its creation: The order of nature is regularly maintained, the same causes produce the same effects now, as they did above five thousand years ago; and

though all mankind, and other living creatures, be daily supplied by the earth, sea and air, yet their stores are neither exhausted nor diminished by it.

Here then we may justly cry out with St. Paul, *O the depth of the riches, of the wisdom, and of the knowledge of God!* which neither length of time can wear out, nor distance of place divide, nor variety of objects distract, nor multiplicity of business perplex or weaken? *A thousand years,* says the royal prophet, *are before thine eyes like yesterday, which is just past.* And so a thousand different objects, nay, if you please a million of millions, are no more than a single one of the most trivial nature, to the infinite wisdom and knowledge of God. Because being infinite, it cannot be confined either by number or place, but reaching strongly from end to end, is present to all objects, times and places; and disposes, moves, and governs all things with the same immoveable tranquillity, order, and attention, as if it had but one single creature to inspect and provide for.

Neither must we imagine that his infinite wisdom only applies itself to the most weighty concerns of this world, and leaves the rest to chance, or the pure course of nature: For Christ himself has taken care to instruct us, that the divine providence, and by consequence, knowledge, extends itself even to the most trivial things, as the numbering the very hairs of our heads, or the destiny of a little bird scarce worth a farthing: *Are not two sparrows,* (says Christ,) *sold for a farthing, and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father.* After which nothing more can be said to heighten our idea of the unsearchable depth and boundless extent of an infinite knowledge, particularly as it regards the great business of the last day, and the strict account to be made in it: For, if among so many millions of creatures as are the object of God's providence, even so inconsiderable a one as a *sparrow is not forgotten before the Father, as* St. Luke expresses it; if the government of the whole universe, with all the weighty affairs transacted in it, cannot hinder him from taking an exact cognizance of the number even of the hairs of our heads, we may, in some measure conceive how terrible a thing it will be to appear before a judge so infinitely knowing; and conclude, that not even the smallest circumstance of the longest life will pass without being strictly examined by him.

We must, therefore, consider the infinite knowledge of

God as a vast book, in which all our thoughts, words and deeds, with every circumstance relating to them, are distinctly and particularly set down: Nothing will be forgot, nothing omitted, nothing disguised; not even the most secret intentions and motives upon which we have acted: And in the moment we appear before the sacred tribunal, *this book will be opened*, as St. John expresses it, and give us as clear a view of all the particulars of our lives, as if we saw them written in the beams of the sun: *Ordinabuntur ante infelicium animam omnia peccata sua*, says St. Austin, Serm. 181; that is, *the unhappy sinner shall see all his sins ranged in exact order before him:* Not only those that have been committed in public, but those also which he has industriously concealed from the eyes of men. *There is nothing covered*, (says Christ,) *that shall not be revealed, nor hid, that shall not be known.* All his hypocrisy will be unmasked, and his works of darkness exposed in the clearest light: For *darkness*, (says the royal prophet,) *shall not be hid from thee, and night shall be enlightened like day.* The sins of youth, which have been long forgot by the criminal, will be presented as fresh before him, as if they had been committed that very day: *Because a thousand years are before God's eyes like yesterday, which is just past:* and those which have been overlooked, either through culpable ignorance, or wilful neglect, will appear on account, not according to the erroneous judgment made of them, by a biassed and partial conscience, but as they are in themselves, and the unerring judgment of God.

But this is not all: For not only the sins we have committed, but also the duties we have omitted, and the favours we have received, and not profited by, will be brought to light, and an account demanded of them: They are all faithfully set down in the great book of accounts, and neither the number of years we have lived, nor the variety of circumstance through which our lives have passed, will in the least perplex the evidence, or confound the exact order with which they will be produced against us. *The unhappy sinner will see all his sins ranged in order before him.*

Here all the time we have embezzled, or misspent, the talents we have buried under ground, the temporal blessings we have abused, and the graces we have neglected, will be manifested with the utmost convincing evidence. And since there is no state of life but has many duties incumbent

on it, the omission of those duties will be a separate article in the indictment brought against us: Many persons, free, perhaps from sins in their private lives, will be found great sinners, when considered in their public capacities. *A prince, a magistrate, a pastor, a parent, or master of a family,* have many more besides themselves to answer for: Abuses in a government or community, that might and ought to have been reformed, will be charged upon the magistrate or superior, by whom they have been tolerated or connived at; sinful disorders not corrected in a family, will be placed on account to the master or mistress of it, though they were not personally guilty of them; children lost by the neglect of their parents, will be required at their hands. And so it will be in relation to all the respective duties of the station in which God has placed us.

Hence it appears, how terrible a thing it will be for a sinner, dying in impenitence, to fall into the hands of an omniscient judge, who, with a ray of that infinite light in which he dwells, will dissipate in an instant all the darkness he has not only lived in but indulged, and discover to him, at one single view, the whole state of his unhappy soul.—Oh! what a dreadful sight will it be for an unfortunate criminal to see, not only all his own personal sins committed, from the first use of reason to his dying day, all the abuses of God's favour, and all the omissions he has ever been guilty of, but over and above all, the sins of others, to which he has been accessary, placed before him all at once, in so clear a light, that it will be impossible for him either to deny, excuse, or answer any one single point laid to his charge.

We may in some measure conceive the terror, confusion, and despair this will cause in a criminal soul, if we but consider, what a torment it is to a conscience charged with many crimes, to enter seriously into itself, even in this life. For since men are usually afraid to look their sins in the face, and do what they can to turn their thoughts away from them; since it is evident, from experience, that a guilty conscience, whose remorses cannot be avoided, is a kind of hell upon earth, and that the anguish and terror of it has driven some to the most violent extremities, even in this world, where there is always hope of mercy, where there are many intervals of ease, where no man can see the whole number of his sins at once, nor any one of them in its full deformity; This, I say, being the case of a criminal conscience, even in

this world, what an unspeakable torture will it be to a sinner dying in impenitence, when in the moment that death closes the eyes of his body, and opens those of his soul, he sees, at a single view, that vast multitude of sins, with which his conscience stands charged, clearly and distinctly before him, attended with all the aggravating circumstances, which are often more enormous, and cause a heavier load of confusion, than the sins themselves; and all this without any hopes of mercy or comfort! Because the same light, which discovers to him the number and enormity of his sins makes him also clearly see his doom, and everlasting exclusion, from all farther share in the mercies of God.

I shall conclude this discourse with two practical reflections. The first regards those, who seem to be well enough at ease, so they can but hide their sins from the knowledge of men, and therefore hesitate not to do those things before the all-seeing eyes of God, which they would certainly forbear to do, if they but suspected that they were within the observation of the meanest creature upon earth. Now, though we must allow that this cautious way of sinning, is at least a mark that they who practise it have not lost all shame (which is always a commendable quality, and prevents the guilt of public scandal) yet we cannot but say, that their proceeding is very unaccountable, that they should be so much awed by mere human respects, and the fear of confusion before men, and have at the same time no regard to the knowledge and judgment of God, whom they know to be actually present to, and an eye-witness of, every sin they commit.

These therefore ought to reflect frequently and seriously upon the following truths: 1. That whenever they sin, though ever so secretly, it is in the presence of him, who is one day to be their judge. 2. That he not only knows all their sins, but keeps an account of them, and lays them up against the *day of wrath*, to be then brought to light, to their eternal confusion. 3. That it avails them nothing, to keep up a reputation with men, whilst at the same time they forfeit the favour and esteem of God, by whose judgment alone they must stand or fall. Lastly, that after all, they will be disappointed, even as to what they seem to take most to heart, viz. the concealment of their sins from men. Because, in the last *general judgment*, every thing will be made known, and even their most secret sins exposed to the

view of all mankind. If these truths were deeply imprinted in mens' hearts, and not only believed, but sensibly felt by them, which can only be the effect of a long and serious meditation, it is not to be doubted, but they would by degrees become a happy restraint, even upon the most violent inclinations, and make men at least as much afraid to transgress in the presence of Almighty God, as before a person for whose judgment and esteem they have a real value.

My second reflection regards those, who through shame either lay aside the use of the sacraments, or, what is worse, become guilty of sacrilege, by the concealment of some sin in confession. I own some tempers, naturally bashful and reserved, are much to be pitied in this point; but whatever their difficulty may be, it must be overcome: And it is hard to say, whether the *sin* or *folly* in being overcome by it be greater. I shall hereafter treat both the one and the other at large: at present I shall only touch upon the latter, as it has a connection with the great truth I have laid before you, which sets the *folly* of this sin in its strongest and clearest light, and shews plainly that the persons guilty of it are no less wanting to reason and good sense, than their duty: For ask but a person of the meanest capacity, when the choice of two evils is proposed, which of the two is to be preferred, the *lesser* or the *greater?*— And he will certainly answer, the *lesser*. Ask a criminal, whether he will rather choose a private disgrace, or public ignominy? and you may be sure he will not spend much time in deliberating upon the matter, because a private disgrace is the lesser evil of the two.

Now, this is the very case of a person guilty of some crime committed against God. He must either submit to a private confusion, in accusing himself of it to his confessor, or undergo the public ignominy of having it one day exposed, to his eternal shame and confusion, before the eyes of all the world. One of the two must be; and he has it now in his power to choose either the one or the other. The first is but a momentary confusion, followed immediately by an entire repose and ease of conscience; and so private, that no man alive but his confessor can have any knowledge of it. The other is a public disgrace, in the face of God, and all his saints and angels: And the violent impression of shame and confusion, which it makes upon the soul in that moment, will last for all eternity. I ask then, whether a per-

son can pretend to be in his right senses, if he prefers the latter? The case is too plain against him to admit of a dispute.

Let us then beseech Almighty God to imprint in our hearts so deep a sense of his infinite knowledge, and the strict account we shall be called to, that whether we be in public or private, in company or alone, we may be afraid to do any thing displeasing to his pure eyes, and for which we shall be exposed to everlasting confusion hereafter.

TENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE OTHER QUALITIES OF THE JUDGE.

He will render to every man according to his works.
Rom. ii. 6.

In my last discourse I promised to consider three things in the judge before whom we are to appear: 1. His infinite knowledge, from which nothing can be concealed: 2. His being the very person whom we offend by every sin we commit: and 3. His being infinitely just. I have already spoken of the first. The two latter considerations shall therefore be the subject of this Entertainment.

We shall be able to conceive, in some measure, how great a terror it will be to appear before a judge, who is the very person that has been offended and injured by us, if we but consider the repugnance all men naturally have to see those to whom they have done any remarkable injury or affront. A person who is conscious to himself of having been notoriously ungrateful to his benefactor, suffers a sensible mortification in appearing before him. His blushes betray the inward shame and trouble of his mind; because the presence and sight of his benefactor revive in it the idea of his favours, and the ill returns he has made of them. A wife that has abused the conjugal bed, unless she be an abandoned creature, and lost to all shame, cannot bear the sight of her husband, if she knows for certain that he is informed of the injustice she has done him. So a subject, who has betrayed his prince, dreads nothing more than to appear before him; because his very presence is a reproach to his guilty conscience, and upbraids him with the foulness of his crime. Thus Adam had no sooner eaten the forbidden fruit, but he hid himself from the face of the Lord; and that which till

then had been his greatest glory and delight, became all on a sudden his greatest terror.

But the history of Joseph, and his brothers, affords one of the most remarkable instances of this truth. You all know how they contrived his death; but upon the remonstrances of Judah, sold him to certain merchants, who carried him away into Egypt, and there sold him for a slave; where some years after he was, by God's providence, raised to the highest dignity, and made superintendant of all Egypt. At which time, by the same disposition of providence, there happened a great dearth all the world over, and Joseph's brothers, amongst others, were obliged to go into Egypt to buy corn of him. He knew them all at the very first interview, but was not known by them till some days after, he discovered himself in the following manner: Having ordered those who were present to withdraw, and being alone with his brothers, he gave full vent to the tenderness of his heart, and bursting out into a flood of tears, he only spoke these kind words to them: *Fear not, I am your brother* Joseph: *Is my father still alive?* At which discovery of himself, though in so tender a manner, the scripture tells us, they were all struck dumb with excessive fear. *Non poterant respondere fratres, nimio terrore perterriti.* The unexpected sight of a brother, and that in such happy circumstances, which would have caused a transport of joy in others, seized them with terror and confusion; because his presence revived, in an instant, a fresh remembrance of all the injustice they had done him, as if they had committed it that very day.

This is a weak representation of what will happen to reprobate sinners, in the moment that Christ shall manifest himself visibly to them: For as the sight of him, all glorious, impassible, and immortal, will be the glory, joy, and comfort of the elect, so will it be terror of the wicked. *Videntes turbabuntur timore horribili:* Seeing him they shall be struck with a dreadful fear, says the word of God; because they shall see in him a *benefactor*, whom they have repaid with ingratitude; a *spouse*, whom they have abused; a *sovereign*, whom they have betrayed; and a *brother*, whom they have many times sold for a sordid interest, or brutal pleasure.

But he will not then say to them as Joseph did, *fear not, I am your brother*, nor shed tears of compassion over them; but, on the contrary, the very terror and majesty of his looks

will in an instant convince them, that he who till then had been their injured Saviour and Redeemer, is now come to be their judge. *Horrende apparebit*, says the wise man: *He will appear to them in a dreadful manner.* He will then shew them the precious blood they have trampled upon by their sacrilegious communions; the sacred body they have crucified afresh, and put to open shame, by their scandalous lives; and the wounds of his hands and feet, and sacred side, which they have renewed a thousand times by their enormous crimes. St. Austin represents him speaking to them in this manner: *Videte vulnera, quæ inflixistis, agnoscite latus quod pupugistis:* That is, *See the wounds you inflicted, see the side you have pierced.* Oh! what a dreadful sight will this be! The sight of a judge, who has been despised, mocked and crucified by the criminal whose doom he is going to pronounce: The sight of a judge, who knows every aggravating circumstance of all the crimes he has ever committed against him; finally, the sight of a judge who is infinitely just, and will accordingly do himself justice to the utmost rigour.

Now this last quality, I mean his infinite justice, added to the two former, renders the case of a person dying in mortal sin, and summoned before the tribunal of Christ, not only frightful beyond imagination, but utterly desperate. For though his judge were infinitely knowing, though he were the party offended in all his crimes, yet if there were still room for mercy, if the judge were capable of being either biassed by interest or inclination, or moved with compassion, to mitigate at least the sentence, and not pronounce against him, according to the utmost rigour of justice, this would be at least some comfort. But the judge is not only just, but infinitely just: and an infinite justice, joined with an infinite knowledge of the merits of the cause, excludes all hopes of any milder sentence, than precisely what the number and quality of his sins have deserved: Because justice, as it regards the office of a judge, is a virtue which determines him to bestow rewards, and inflict punishments, exactly proportioned to the merits of the cause he has before him. So that the greatest saint will be judged by Christ, with the same exactness and equality of justice as the greatest sinner: Because, as St. Paul tells us, *he will render to every man according to his works.*

In this world, indeed, things are not so. Justice is often

perverted, either through the weakness or corruption of the judge: And so it happens many times, that innocence is oppressed, and wickedness is rewarded, or at least unpunished. But suppose justice were always administered impartially, yet in this world there would seldom be an exact equality between the punishment and the crime; because this equality is wholly unknown to men, which by consequence makes most human laws defective; and where the rule itself is defective, the practice guided by it must be so too. So that the justice of this world is but a faint shadow of that of the other, where every thing will be according to exact weight and measure: and, therefore, as every saint in Heaven will possess a degree of glory, exactly proportioned to the merits of his past good works, so will every damned soul in Hell have his degree of torments measured out to him, with the most exact proportion, to the number, quality and each aggravating circumstance of his sins. *Quantum fuit in deliciis, tantum date illi tormenta:* that is, *as much as he has been in delights, so much torment let him suffer*, will be the doom of Babylon, and of every reprobate soul: and this exact proportion will be determined in the very instant that the criminal soul appears before the tribunal of Christ.

Neither will he have the least regard to the riches, titles, or dignity of any person: for there is no respect of persons with God, who hates sin, and will punish it with equal rigour wherever he finds it. So that before the great tribunal there will be no distinction between king and subjects, masters and servants, but that which is grounded upon the merits or demerits of their lives past. Nay, greatness and wealth will rather entitle the possessors to a severer judgment; because they are talents, with which they are entrusted, and an account will be demanded, whether they have employed them to the benefit or prejudice of their own and neighbours' souls. A great man is generally either a great good or a great evil to mankind, and the instrument either of God's wrath or mercy on those who depend upon him: and therefore, as he seldom goes unattended either to Hell or Heaven, so his reward will be the greater in proportion to the number he has helped to save, and his torments will likewise receive an additional increase to the score of every person, to whose damnation he has been accessary, by the power and influence of his example,

or otherwise. And so this sacred oracle, *potentes potenter tormenta patientur*, that is, *the mighty shall suffer mighty torments*, which makes their greatness the measure of the punishment, will be fully verified of them.

Thus will the infinite justice of God exert itself in the last day, by inflicting punishments with an equal and impartial hand, and demanding of every man the last farthing of the debt he has contracted. And this debt will be computed not only by the number and quality of the sins he has committed and not satisfied for, but also by the benefits he has received, whether temporal or spiritual; of which there will be a dreadful example in those cities where Christ preached, and wrought many miracles without fruit, since he himself, who is to be their judge, has already pronounced this terrible sentence upon them, that even the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, *will in the day of judgment be more favourably treated than they:* Because that signal blessing of his preaching, and working miracles amongst them, being a *talent* received, and not improved, must be accounted for, and will but serve to increase the reckoning: And therefore as it will aggravate the debt contracted by their other sins, so will it in the same proportion increase their punishment. And this will also be the unhappy case of reprobate Christians, who having received and abused favours far surpassing those of the Jews, will by consequence receive a far severer judgment than they, and be the most unfortunate of all human creatures.

Nor is this exact severity of God's justice in the other world, any ways derogatory from that infinite mercy so much extolled in holy writ. For as God is infinite in all his attributes, so his mercy is that peculiar one, by which he chiefly delights to manifest himself to men during the course of this mortal life. *His mercies* (says the prophet) *are above all his works.* And even his omnipotence (according to the celebrated prayer of the church) shews itself in nothing so much as in the works of his mercy. But since all outward communications of the divine attributes in this world are created effects, and all created effects are limited, it follows, that though God's mercy be infinite in itself, it has its stinted bounds in relation to creatures. The source itself is inexhaustible, and flows incessantly upon all men in this life, whether saints or sinners, though not with the same profusion. But the whole course of its

stream is in an instant turned away from a sinner dying in impenitence.

So that the whole life of a man may properly be called the time of mercy. No sinner's case is so desperate, but God has provided remedies for it. His arms are stretched out to receive him. The fountains of grace are always open, and the sacred blood of Christ, which they contain, suffices to wash away the blackest crimes. So that nothing but his own perverse will can hinder him from applying its infinite virtue to itself, and becoming partaker of the plentiful redemption which he has prepared for all. Now these are all undoubted instances of an infinite mercy. But the fruit and application of it, in relation to the soul of any impenitent sinner ceases in the very moment that the soul goeth out of his body. He enters then into another world, where *justice* takes place, and performs its part, as mercy did in the most bountiful manner, whilst he was in a state to be partaker of it. But having been deaf to the very last, to all its calls and solicitations, he then falls into the hands of rigorous justice, is summoned before its sacred tribunal, and receives his unchangeable doom precisely according to his works.

For this reason, the last day is never mentioned in holy scripture, but in terms proper to strike the heart with terror. It is called the day of wrath. A day of calamity and distress. A day exceedingly bitter. But why is it that the word of God has represented a day on which our eternal interest depends, and is by consequence so terrible in itself, in such frightful colours, as seem to heighten rather than mitigate the terror of it? Is it to throw us into despair, or weaken our confidence in the mercies of our divine Redeemer? By no means. On the contrary, the only end it aims at is, to season our souls with a wholesome fear: That fear, I say, which the psalmist calls the beginning of wisdom: That fear, which keeps the balance of the soul equally poised between presumption and despair: Finally, that fear, which naturally puts us upon our guard against the danger that threatens us, and by spurring us on to a vigorous war against sin, and the practice of good works, lays the foundation of a solid confidence in God, and a sincere love of him.

Hence the psalmist calls the *man blessed, who fears the Lord, because he shall take great delight in his commandments.* And the wise man tells us, that *fear shall delight*

the heart. But how is this? since we find by experience, that what we do out of fear, is rather a painful constraint upon nature, than a source of delight or pleasure. But the answer is clear and easy. For, though it be certainly true, that if the work of our salvation were to be carried on by mere servile fear, we should find but little comfort in the path of God's commandments; yet, if we consider that we are not to stop there, but pass on to a better disposition; if we consider that fear is but the harbinger of love, and prepares the way to it, by removing obstacles, and applying us to proper means to introduce it, we shall have no difficulty to conceive that fear is no enemy to true pleasure, that is, to the solid repose of our souls; but, on the contrary, is wholly in its interest, as being an instrument, encourager, and promoter of it.

The reason, therefore, why fear is said to be the beginning of wisdom, and a source of delight to the soul, is because what is first begun by fear is improved gradually, and perfected by love. Fear is as the centinel that gives the first alarm, and warns us of the approaching danger. But whilst we are fighting for God's cause with the arms of prayer, and other holy exercises, proper for our spiritual combat, love comes in, and takes the command into his hands, and when love commands in the heart, every thing is performed with delight; so that fear is as necessary to secure our souls, as centinels and advanced guards are necessary to secure an army when an enemy is near: which made the wise man declare, that it is impossible to be justified without fear. *Qui sine timore est non poterit justificari.* Eccl. 1. v. 28.

In effect, the first step to a sinner's conversion is usually owing to a lively apprehension of the severity of God's judgments. This gives a check to the violence of his passions. This makes him solicitous to discover and practise the means necessary to avoid the dreadful evils that threaten him. His practising these means enlightens by degrees his understanding, softens the heart, and inflames the will. And so it is that love is introduced, and accomplishes the work of salvation, which was at first begun through mere servile fear.

If, therefore, upon hearing or reading a severe truth any one finds himself seized with fear, let not that dishearten him; it is a good symptom, and he has reason to hope in God's mercies, because he fears his justice. *Pierce my*

heart with thy fear, was the prayer of the royal prophet. For it is God himself inspires us with this disposition, for our greater security; since those who are abandoned by him, neither fear him, nor desire to fear him; because it disturbs their pleasures, and self-love is uneasy with it; but the love of God finds its account in it, in being not only introduced, but fortified and secured by it.

We ought, therefore, to fear God, that we may love him, and we ought never to cease to fear him, that we may never cease to love him. The more we fear him now, the greater will our security be, when we come to die. *Timenti Dominum, bene erit in extremis*, says Solomon, *He who fears the Lord, will be easy in the end of his days.* And when death summons him to appear before the tribunal of Christ, he will stand before him, not with the terror of a criminal going to receive the sentence of eternal death, but with the confidence of a faithful servant, expecting the full recompence of his last labours, in the enjoyment of a happy eternity.

ELEVENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE EXAMINATION TO BE MADE OF OUR HIDDEN SINS.

I am not conscious to myself of anything; yet am I not hereby justified: But he that judgeth me, is the Lord. 1 Cor. iv. 4.

This was spoken by a saint of the first class, who after his conversion, devoted himself wholly to the service of Jesus Christ, and his holy church. His labours and sufferings for the planting of the gospel were without intermission; and nothing but the most ardent zeal for the honour and interest of his master, could have supported him under the many hardships, outrages, and persecutions to which his sacred ministry continually exposed him. God has also manifested his holiness by many miracles; and his being caught up to the third heaven, was an undoubted pledge of the high degree of favour to which God had raised him; yet amidst the eminent virtues that shined in him, the faithful discharge of his laborious ministry, and the favours God had heaped upon him, joined with a conscience entirely free from reproach, this great saint was not without some fear of the judgment of the searcher of hearts; as appears from the fore-mentioned words of my text: *I am not*, (says he,) *con-*

scious to myself of anything ; yet I am not hereby justified. But he that judgeth me is the Lord.

This contains a very useful and instructive lesson, warning us not to be over confident of ourselves, whatever virtue we may seem to possess. There are many Christians, (and it were to be wished the number were far greater,) who though inferior by many degrees to the merits of St. Paul, yet leading a kind of regular and innocent life, may in some measure say with him, that *they are not conscious to themselves of anything ;* that is, of any noted crime, or remarkable transgression of the law of God. But can this give them any entire security of being justified ? St. Paul says positively it cannot, *because he that judgeth me, is the Lord.*

Hence it follows manifestly, that there are hidden sins known to God alone, for which however we are to be accountable to him. The proud Pharisee, mentioned in the gospel, was not conscious to himself of anything. Nay, he had a great opinion of his own virtue and merits, yet we all know how criminal he was in the sight of God. The case of the bishop of Laodicea, mentioned in the third chapter of the Revelations, was much the same. For he was fully satisfied with the state he was in, imagining himself to be *rich* in grace and merits ; whereas, the searcher of hearts ordered St. John to let him know, that he was *wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.* Rev. iii. 17.

Thus many are apt to over-rate their own merits, and be misled by it into a security, which usually becomes the mother of sloth, tepidity, and presumption. They see themselves free from the customary vices of mankind, (and it is doubtless a blessing to be highly valued, and acknowledged with the deepest sense of gratitude,) but they consider not with St. Paul, that *He who judgeth is the Lord,* and that by consequence there may be many defects and blemishes in their souls, which escape their notice, but cannot escape the pure and all discerning eyes of him who will judge them, not according to what they appear to themselves or others, but according to what they really are. I shall, therefore, in this Entertainment, lay down some genuine reasons for which the most virtuous, in appearance, may mistrust themselves on the score of hidden sins, whereof there will be a strict examination made on the great day of accounts.

There are two sorts of hidden sins, which will be placed

to our account on the day of judgment. *First*, Those which we know to be sins, but through heedlessness seldom observe ourselves to be guilty of them. And, *secondly*, Those which we commit with sufficient reflection, but persuade ourselves to be no sins. As to the former sort, which are occasioned by heedlessness, and want of care, every one may make some guess to what degree he may be concerned in them, by only reflecting in what measure he has been wanting in his endeavours to prevent them. For they that live in a state of idleness, indulging themselves in all the dangerous liberties of the world, or are naturally of a negligent and heedless temper, and take no care to arm themselves against this evil; these, I say, may reasonably suspect themselves accountable for many secret sins:

1. Of *Omission*, particularly in the neglect of duties relating to their respective state or calling.

2. Of *Thought*, by being guilty of many rash judgments, to the prejudice of their neighbour; by thoughts of revenge, or such as are contrary to Christian purity; by ill-wishes, or unlawful desires; and the like.

3. Of the *Tongue*, by backbiting or worldly discourses; by spreading or improving uncharitable reports, and so forth; to say nothing of the many sins they may be guilty of, by performing the best part of their actions purely upon motives of self-interest, vanity, or other human respects: for if even those, who keep a constant watch upon themselves, are nevertheless apt not only to be surprised into, but even to overlook many of the sins here mentioned, how jealous ought they to be of themselves, who live without ease, speak without caution, let their thoughts and tongue run at random, and seldom look into themselves, to observe the motions and intentions of their hearts? Truly, it is morally impossible but persons of this character must fall into many sins of which they have no knowledge: or if at times some checks of conscience serve as monitors to give them notice of what they are thinking or saying amiss, these generally go off without leaving any lasting impression, being either stifled or diverted by other thoughts crowding in upon them. And whereas, these careless and slothful Christians seldom give themselves the trouble of a diligent examination of conscience at night, by means whereof the most considerable failings of each day might be discovered, and laid up safe in their memories, in order to be brought to a more

rigorous account in their next confession; the unavoidable consequence of this neglect is, that many even of those sins, which they took notice of in the committing, go by degrees out of their minds, and so perhaps, are never more thought of till death and judgment brings them to light. And though God alone, who is to be the judge, can tell in what measure sins thus overlooked or forgot will be laid to their charge, it is certain, however, that the more wilful the neglect has been, the less room there will be for mercy, unless heartily repented of, and amended in due time.

Now, as to what relates to those hidden sins, which we commit with sufficient reflection, but persuade ourselves to be no sins, the root of these is a culpable or affected ignorance, occasioned either by neglect, insincerity, prevention, or the delusion of self-love. For the clearer understanding whereof, we are to observe, that there are two sorts of ignorance, viz. an invincible and a culpable one. A person is said to labour under an invincible ignorance, when he never had it in his power to inform himself of the truth. And this ignorance being without any fault on his side, excuses from sin; nor will any omissions or transgressions occasioned by it be laid to his charge.

But a person is culpably ignorant, when it is his own fault that he knows no better; and this is the case of all those who either wilfully shut their eyes against the truth, or out of sloth, and want of concern for their souls, neglect the ordinary means appointed by God for their being sufficiently instructed in their duty. Now, it is a great mistake to imagine, that this ignorance will be any excuse in favour of those who are concerned in it, because it is their own fault, if they transgress for want of knowing their duty; since they might have known it, had they but taken care to inform themselves; and, therefore, as their ignorance is wilful, so all the miscarriages occasioned by it are also wilful, and by consequence inexcusable. But as neglect, or want of care is the occasion of ignorance in some, so insincerity is a no less ordinary root of it in others. Many seem very solicitous to know what is lawful or unlawful in certain doubtful cases, they pretend to take advice, and shew a readiness to follow it; but being insincere at heart, and rather afraid than really desirous to know the truth, they use double-dealing in their pretended search of it, by mistating their case, and either adding some material circumstance,

which wholly disguises the true nature of it, or concealing something which might give light to those they consult By this means their directors, who have no reason to mistrust any such unfair dealing, are imposed upon ; and misjudging their case, give their opinion or advice accordingly. And thus instead of shewing them the way to heaven, are the innocent occasion of their being misled, or confirmed in their former errors. But though the deluded directors be innocent in this case, those who trepan them into an approbation of what is really unwarrantable, are far from being so ; and though they may in some measure stifle the murmurs of conscience, by foolishly persuading themselves that they act according to the direction or consent of their spiritual guides, their pretended ignorance, under which they imagine to shelter themselves, will avail them nothing at the great day of accounts, and all their transgressions occasioned by it, will stand in full against them.

Another fruitful source of hidden sins is a strong prevention, imbibed either by education or the discourses of persons whose judgment, and even virtue, we have a great opinion of. This was the case of the Jewish people, who having a great opinion of the learning and virtue of the Pharisees, were, by their discourses and malicious insinuations so violently prepossessed against our blessed Saviour, that they even demanded his death. It is true, this prevention may be very innocent, as long as it regards only indifferent things or opinions, and is not heightened into party zeal, so as to cause warm disputes, whereby charity is often wounded. But if it regards the reputation of any person, or, what is worse, of a great number of persons, and is at the same time wholly groundless, and by consequence unjust, as it often happens, then it is far from being innocent. Nay, it is the root of numberless sins. *First*, Because, persons under this prevention seldom make any scruple of entertaining the most rash and uncharitable judgment of those against whom they are thus prepossessed ; and, *secondly*, Because these rash judgments are the immediate source of innumerable defamations, whereby persons of solid virtue and merit have often been ruined, both in their reputation and fortune, and thereby rendered incapable of being serviceable to their neighbour, in the station wherein God has placed them. And will the God of Justice leave such crying injustices unpunished! Or will they be excused by a pretended ig-

norance! I fear not, as long as the parties concerned stop their ears to every thing that may disabuse them of their error, and have them only open to hear reports proper to nourish and strengthen their prevention; which renders their ignorance wholly inexcusable, because they have it in their power to be delivered from it, if they please.

A fourth root of culpable ignorance, is an irregular inclination or secret passion in the soul; for every degree of passion being attended with a proportionable degree of spiritual blindness, the judgment is always more or less biassed or corrupted by it, and prepossessed in favour of it; and so if any doubt arises concerning what is lawful or unlawful, it is ever apt to lean on that side which flatters the favourite inclination. Thus an erroneous conscience is formed by degrees, the gospel is accommodated to corrupt nature, and the narrow way to Heaven is made broad enough for self-love to walk in; yet conscience is all the while pretended to be the guide; and so it is—but it is a conscience of their forming, who study to deceive themselves; and is, therefore, modelled in all things suitably to the inclination that is to be gratified.

It is according to this sort of conscience, that many make no scruple at all to wrong their creditors, and often put them to the greatest hardships, by refusing, or unreasonably delaying to pay their debts: which however is, in many cases, the same injustice as cheating or robbing them of their money. It is according to the same sort of conscience, that many stick not to employ the most unfair and illegal means to make their fortune, or increase their wealth. Their only care is not to come within the reach of human laws; but they consider not, that they must one day appear before a tribunal, where he that judgeth is the Lord. Finally, it is according to this sort of conscience, that many, having their hearts fixed upon the world, indulging themselves in all its dangerous pleasures, and living almost in a total forgetfulness of Almighty God, and neglect of the duties relating to him, yet think all is well, and cry those down as indiscreetly rigid, who profess and teach a stricter morality. And what is the root of all this wilful and affected ignorance, but some secret passion in the soul, which being a false bias upon the judgment, inclines it to approve and think favourably of every thing that flatters that passion? And thus they walk on blindly in the way of perdition, in hopes

to meet Heaven at the end of it, till death opens their eyes, and shews them the fatal error they have lived under.

The last great root of hidden sins, is a slothful and lukewarm temper, which easily betrays those who are guilty of it, even to sins whereby God's grace may be forfeited, and that without being aware of it; for if we examine the nature of sloth, we shall find that a considerable degree of it, especially when it becomes an habitual indisposition, suffices alone to create mistrust of the state of the soul infected with it. The reason is, because a considerable degree of sloth seems altogether inconsistent with two of the most essential duties of a christian, viz. the love of God above all things, and the obligation he has to seek first the kingdom of God.

That it seems wholly inconsistent with the love of God above all things, appears plainly from the very opposition of their natures and effects, which run all directly counter to one another: for sloth is indifferent, languid, and inactive in every thing that has a relation to God: always inclining us to our ease and satisfaction; whereas the love of God, when it is mistress of the heart, is eager, watchful, vigorous and active in all the concerns of eternity: It renders us solicitous to know the will of God, ready to obey it, and desirous to please him in all things: In effect, whomsoever we love with an absolute preference to all others, we are always solicitous to serve and please. And, therefore, when little or nothing of this appears in relation to God, it is a strong symptom that the love of him is not the prevailing disposition of the heart.

The same is to be said in reference to the great duty incumbent on all christians, of seeking first the kingdom of God: for how can the slothful christian, who performs all duties that have an immediate relation to God in a careless manner, be said to make Heaven his chief concern? Or, with what probability can we judge it to be the principal object of his desires, when we see him languid and indifferent in the pursuit of it? Change but the case from Heaven to the world, and see whether an earnest desire of its goods be ever without an earnest and vigorous application to obtain them. Does a man that thirsts after interest or honour, leave any means untried that favour his desires, or obstacle unremoved that stands in his way? Does he not use all his endeavours possible to compass the end he aims at? and take

all precautions necessary to prevent a disappointment?—These are doubtless the methods of the children of this world; and the reason is, because their desires are eager, and eager desires admit of no indifference or sloth. They naturally inspire the soul with vigour, put life into her, and spur her on to action, allowing her no time to rest till all be done that can contribute to render them successful.

And is there not then ground enough to conclude, the kingdom of God is not very earnestly desired, when nothing of this spirit, life, and vigour appears towards the gaining of it; but, on the contrary, every thing is carried on with coldness, negligence, and sloth? The consequence is but too clear; and there follows another no less clearly from it, viz. that however a person of this character may value himself upon his virtue, he has reason enough to mistrust the state of his soul, especially if to the two fore-mentioned considerations be added, the danger such a one is in of coming often indisposed to the sacrament.

The reason is, because considering the habits such a one has of doing things negligently and by halves, it is much to be feared the same lazy and slothful humour follows him mostly even to the tribunal of penance: And is there not then great danger of such a one's coming to it wholly indisposed? The case is but too clear. For since, of all the duties of a christian, his receiving the sacrament is of the greatest importance, and requires a very serious preparation, what encouragement have we to hope this from one, who is ever inclined to consult his ease, and give way to the suggestions of sloth? Is there not, on the contrary, reason enough to apprehend such a one will be faulty either in the due examination of conscience, or the sorrow he ought to have; since these are tasks which require a more serious application than a person, accustomed to indulge his sloth, will probably use to perform them as he ought.

However, it is here necessary to observe, that what has been said, (particularly concerning the danger of abusing the sacraments,) regards not persons of a timorous or tender conscience, as appears plainly from the character I have given of those who alone are concerned in it: For persons of a timorous conscience are always apt to over-do their duty, rather than fall short of it. Their chief fault is too much solicitude rather than neglect; and their predominant weakness is an immoderate fear, which is so apt to make them run into ex-

cesses on the right side, that they are in no danger of erring on the left: Nay, if there be any danger in their state, it consists in their being, for the most part, too stiff, and positive in the unfavourable judgment they make of themselves, and not paying the submission they ought to their directors, who are better able to judge of their condition than they themselves. Because an excessive fear is no less apt to set things in a false light, and impose upon the judgment, than presumption: And therefore those who are told by their directors, that they are subject to this weakness, ought to be convinced that terrifying truths are not intended for them, but for those alone, who, though careless and slothful in performing all duties, yet live without fear, and are therefore in danger of going in the same slothful way, and good opinion of themselves, till death presents them before the tribunal of the great searcher of hearts, before whom *nothing is covered that shall not be revealed, nor hid, that shall not be known.* Matt. x. 26.

TWELFTH ENTERTAINMENT.

CONCERNING THE ACCOUNT TO BE GIVEN OF OTHER MEN'S SINS.

Cleanse me from my secret sins, O Lord; and from those of others spare thy servant. Ps. xviii. 13.

This was the humble prayer of the royal prophet, who was solicitous to obtain God's pardon, not only for his own personal sins, but for those also to which he had been any ways accessory in others. And who is there amongst us, that does not stand in need of this mercy? Who dares confidently say his soul is clear, or that he has nothing to answer for his neighbour's sins? What parents or heads of families, or persons in any other post of authority, and intrusted with the care of others, are sure they have not, either by words or actions, or at least by neglect, been the occasion of sin to those that are committed to their charge? Nay, is there any one that has the assurance to affirm, that even in the ordinary commerce of human life, and common conversation, he has always been so watchful over himself, as never to have prejudiced his neighbour's soul by discourse or example? I dare boldly call it a presumption in any man to make this positive judgment of himself.

However, since most christians have but a very weak

idea of this truth, and seem to be secure enough on that side, I shall, in this Entertainment, lay before you the many ways there are of drawing on ourselves the guilt of other men's sins: Of which there will be a strict examination made, and for which we shall be accountable at the great day of assizes.

All sins of thought, as long as they are stifled within our own breasts, and are neither manifested by word or action, being incapable of influencing our neighbour, are purely personal, and consequently foreign to the subject of this discourse. But there is not any sin of the tongue, nor any sinful action, but if practised in company, may, in some measure, be the occasion of sin to others, either by being an immediate inducement, or by preparing at least the remote dispositions to it. The reason is, because all sort of example being of its own nature an encouragement to imitation, as is evident from experience, it follows, that as good example is an inducement to virtue, so bad example is naturally an incentive to vice, and can never be wholly free from infection; and, therefore, as persons that carry an infectious distemper about them, are apt to communicate it to those they converse with, whether they design it or not; so all sinning in the presence of others is catching in some degree, whether it be designed as a snare, or done without any such intention.

Hence it is, that those, who are remarkably given to any vice of the tongue, as *cursing and swearing, detraction, profaneness,* or *immodest language,* or are subject to the sin of *drunkenness,* have something more to answer for than the bare guilt of these sins, considered nakedly in themselves. Because all sins of this sort, being committed in public, are by consequence generally attended with the additional guilt of scandal, in their being an encouragement to all that are present to commit the same. For men are naturally emboldened to venture at what they see others do before them. We contract a certain familiarity with sin, by seeing it often committed: We are weaned by degrees from the horror we had to it. What startled us at first, becomes inoffensive by use, and when we are once reconciled to vice in others, we have but an easy step to make to it ourselves. So that whosoever has been much concerned in the fore-mentioned vices, or others that are public, can never be secure of not having a great deal to answer for on the score of his neigh-

bour, though he never was guilty of expressly soliciting him to sin, or doing any thing with a premeditated design to draw him into it. Because he knows not what mischief his example alone may have done, how far it may have spread, or what impression it may have left behind.

However, this reason holds particularly, when the example is given by those that are in authority, or whose superiority of station in a family makes them remarkable. For then it carries a more powerful malignity, in not only being an encouragement to vice, but giving a sort of credit and reputation to it. Hence it is no wonder that where the heads of families are disorderly, the servants should affect, or at least not fear to be so too: Or that children who daily hear their parents curse and swear, or see them often in drink, should, as they grow up, inherit these vices of them. For considering, how prone all mankind are to imitation, and particularly how apt all children are to imitate their parents, as being brought up from their cradles with a great esteem and respect for them, how is it possible but the example of parents should have the greatest influence imaginable upon them, either to good or evil.

This consideration ought to make all parents wary, even to a nicety, what they either say or do before their children; because whatever they say or do carries weight with it.—And since the tender minds of children are very susceptible of impressions, and the first impressions are generally most lasting, especially such as have a corrupt nature to help them to sink the deeper, all parents that resolve to discharge their duty, and fully discharge the trust that is lodged in them, ought to be careful to set their children no other example, than what they may safely follow, nor let them be witness of any thing, but what may contribute to inspire them with a sense of piety and virtue; and so lead them insensibly into the way of God's commandments. For without this caution they can never be secure of their not having been instrumental to such miscarriages as may afterwards befall them; or that the ruin of their souls, if that should be their unhappy lot, be not laid at their doors.

But to return to my subject; besides this way of encouraging sin by example, I fear all those will scarce be found less criminal, who, though they give no scandal in any part of their own lives, yet through neglect or sloth take no care to prevent the growth of sin in others under their charge.

And here again, all parents will be found guilty, who either let their children grow up without providing them sufficient instruction, or through excessive fondness either wholly overlook their faults, or have not courage enough to correct those they observe in them.

2dly, All masters or mistresses of families, who either countenance or tolerate abuses and irregularities in their servants, which the authority they have over them obliges them to remedy by a due and seasonable method. So that the persons here mentioned, though they may be free from personal sins, and very edifying in their own lives, yet by being ill parents, or careless masters, may be found guilty in the sight of God, of the sins of others, which by their watchfulness and care they might and ought to have prevented.

The severe punishment inflicted on the high priest Heli, is a terrible instance of this truth. For the scripture does not accuse him of any personal irregularity; but his children were guilty of very notorious ones, which gave great scandal. The father indeed chid them mildly for it; but out of fondness, natural to parents, had not the courage to chastise them as their crime deserved. Whereupon Almighty God first sent a prophet to denounce to him the judgments that should befal him, and his whole family; and soon after revealed the same things to Samuel, saying to him, *Behold I do a thing in Israel: and whosoever shall hear it, both his ears shall tingle. In that day I will raise up against Heli all the things I have spoken concerning his house: I will begin, and I will make an end. For I have foretold unto him, that I will judge his house for ever, for iniquity, because he knew that his sons did wickedly, and did not chastise them. Therefore have I sworn to the house of Heli, that the iniquity of his house shall not be expiated with victims nor offerings for ever.* This was the sentence pronounced by God against Heli and his family; which was soon after executed with the utmost rigour, and ought to be a warning to all those who are in authority, not to draw upon themselves, by a criminal connivance or neglect, the sins of those whom God has committed to their charge.

But now, if even those, who but encourage sin by their example, or hinder it not when they ought, will be found guilty of their neighbour's miscarriages, what a dreadful load of other men's sins do they then heap upon themselves, who are not content to shew the way of iniquity, or stand

still to see them run headlong into it, but even drag them forcibly to it by commanding, persuading, counselling, soliciting, threatening, or otherwise provoking them to it? These indeed are such professed agents and ministers of Satan, that it is not to be doubted, but as they now serve him in so eminent a post, so will they hereafter receive their reward accordingly. They are like those heads and ringleaders of rebellion, who fight not only in person against their sovereign, but levy forces against him; and their sin, like the Devil, mentioned by St. Mark, may properly be called Legion. But there being several degrees of this sin too foul to be mentioned, I shall only touch upon some few branches of it of an inferior degree of malice; because these being comparatively less enormous, are slighted by many, and scarce reputed sins.

First then, all those are here concerned, who in course maintain any principle or doctrine contrary to the doctrine of the gospel: Such as is, for example, the lawfulness of revenging an affront. Nor are they less guilty who applaud them that do it, running out at large in commendation of their bravery and courage; or vilify those who decline it. For this is nothing less than preaching up vice to the company, and exhorting them to practice what is flatly condemned by the laws, both of God and man.

2*dly*, They that put bad books into the hands, particularly of young persons, I mean books tending either to profaneness, immodesty, or any other sort of immorality.

3*dly*, They who sow discord, and by carrying stories to and fro, either cause misunderstanding, or widen breaches already made. Persons of this humour are mere firebrands in a family, the very bane of human society, and deserve to have a mark of infamy set upon them, that all may be upon their guard against them.

4*thly*, They are guilty, at least in some degree, who, by flattery and affected praises, contribute to inspire their neighbour with a vain conceit of himself, and thereby increase the principal distemper of human nature. For we all know that pride is the reigning disease of mankind; nay the root of all other evils; and that every one brings but too large a share of it into the world. We also find sufficiently by experience, that flatteries and praises are the greatest fomenters of this vice. Now then, since charity obliges all men even to remedy, as far as in them lies, and much more not

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to augment their neighbour's evils, how comes it, that in this particular instance, the contrary is every where practised without scruple? We applaud, magnify, and extol him before his face, and think no harm is done, yet are all the while infusing a most dangerous poison into him, nourishing his natural pride, and working him up into an exorbitant opinion of himself. And is all this no sin? Truly, if prejudicing our neighbour in his body be a sin, I cannot well see how wilfully contributing to prejudice his soul should be an innocent thing.

5*thly*, and lastly, those are undoubtedly guilty of a very grievous sin of scandal, who by repeating importunities press others to drink to excess, and when they have prevailed upon their weakness, triumph as if they returned loaden with spoils of a conquered foe. It is of these Solomon tells us, *that they are glad when they have done ill, and rejoice in the most wicked things.* But what a strange part is this for a Christian to act! First to be the wilful author of his neighbour's sin, and then to sport with the mischief he has done? Is sinning then a jesting matter? Is murdering souls a trifle to sport with, and degrading men into beasts, a proper subject of merriment and laughter? This is not only an affront to God, by defacing his sacred image, but looks like insulting over him, and adding contumely to impiety.

Besides, who sees not the ill consequence of making vice a matter of diversion and mirth? For can any thing contribute more effectually to lessen the deformity and heinousness of it, than to see it played and jested with, as if it were nothing more than an ordinary pastime? If any one should seriously maintain, that drunkenness is a becoming quality, his discourse would pass for a satire upon it. But to sport and laugh with it, is to plead for it in earnest; because there needs no more to recommend it, than to make it appear a harmless or indifferent thing: Now whatever men make the subject of a jest, is supposed to be so.

Hence I cannot but accuse those of indiscretion, who when their friends have been disordered with drink, jest as familiarly with them upon that subject, as if they had only been concerned in some innocent frolic. Whereas sinning mortally is too serious a subject to droll upon, and ought either to be seriously reproved, or where that freedom is unseasonable, it is better to be silent than to pre-

judice the cause of virtue by lessening the deformity of vice, which by jesting and laughing with it, naturally tends to. In a word, it is equally dangerous jesting either with virtue or vice : For it does an injury to the one, and a credit to the other, by putting them both upon the level with toys and trifles.

Now therefore to conclude, since there are so many ways of drawing on ourselves the guilt of other men's sins, every one has reason enough to live under a continual fear of appearing before that dreadful tribunal, where so severe an account will be demanded, not only of our own but our neighbour's transgressions. I own it is very painful to nature to be always in fear. But let nature be uneasy, she may comfort herself with considering that *working our salvation in fear and trembling*, is advised by St. Paul as the safest way we can walk in. And the reason is evident: *First*, Because the fear of God's judgment is a continual curb upon corrupt nature, and renders us watchful, not to say or do any thing that may hereafter rise in judgment against us. And 2*dly*, Because it is the mother of humility, and a sovereign preservative against those dangerous suggestions of vanity, which some may be exposed to on the score of their pretended innocence. Those, I mean, who not being conscious of any considerable personal sins, which doubtless is a most signal blessing, are apt to grow too secure, and even presumptuous of God's favour; not reflecting that they are perhaps to be accountable for other men's actions as well as their own; and that being clear from any considerable personal sins, they know not how far they may be concerned in those of their neighbour.

For though, perhaps, they never have encouraged sin by their ill example, are they sure they have not done it by their connivance, silence, or neglect? Though they never pushed or dragged their neighbour to the precipice, have they always been watchful to draw him from it, when they could and ought to do it? Have they never flattered his pride and vanity for private ends ? Have they never encouraged detraction, by shewing a satisfaction to hear it, nor broached discourses, with design to have some one brought upon the stage? Finally, have they not, by their vain and worldly discourses, contributed to inspire their neighbour with a love of the world, and its dangerous pleasures? Now, if they cannot with a full assurance plead

not guilty to any of these articles, what have they else to do but humble themselves daily under the omnipotent hand of God, and, throwing themselves wholly upon his infinite mercies, beseeching him with the royal Prophet, not to charge them with the guilt of other men's sins? And less than this no Christian can do without danger of presumption.

But they who have been notoriously guilty of propagating vice in any kind whatsoever, whether by persuasion or example, have something else to do. For there is also a reparation and atonement due to their neighbour whom they have injured by their scandal; and the best reparation they can make, is to do what they can to become now as serviceable to virtue as they have once been to vice. And how must this be done, but by being now as edifying in their lives, as they were scandalous before? by shewing upon all occasions their abhorrence to their former sins, and by promoting, every where, both by discourse and example, particularly the virtues opposite to those vices, for which they have formerly been most remarkable, and whereby they have chiefly prejudiced their neighbour. For by this method, the satisfaction will bear some proportion to the injustice done. And they will have reason to hope, that Almighty God, who is infinite in mercy as well as justice, seeing their earnest desire, and hearty endeavour to make the best amends they can for what is past, and finding them as zealous now in his cause, as they were once enemies to it, will look upon them with compassion, and cancel the great debt they contracted, both by their own and neighbour's sins, and reverse the sentence he had decreed against them.

THIRTEENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

OF HELL.

OF THE PAIN OF SENSE IN GENERAL.

Every tree therefore that doth not yield good fruit shall be cut down, and cast into the fire. Matt. iii. 10.

HAVING already gone through the most important truths relating to *death* and *judgment*, I shall now begin to speak of the punishments and rewards of the life to come. Concerning which, I shall be careful not to advance any thing but what is either grounded upon the word of God, or taught by divines, or drawn from principles which seem to

be beyond dispute. But I shall first premise a reflection, which appears necessary in relation to such revealed truths as are above our comprehension, and which, according to the elegant figure of St. Paul, *we see now through a glass in a dark manner.* 1 Cor. xiii. 12. Amongst which are the two revealed truths concerning the punishments and rewards of the life to come.

Now in handling truths of this nature, it is impossible to carry our expressions up to what they really are. The very ablest pen or tongue can no more represent them, as they are in themselves, than the most skilful painter can set forth the vast and beautiful orb of the sun in its full natural proportion and lustre. For our words can at best but keep pace with our thoughts, but never go beyond them. We cannot express more than we can conceive. And therefore, since the nature of those truths is above the reach of human understanding; since, as St. Paul tells us, they can only be conceived *in part, and as in a glass darkly,* it follows, that even when they are set forth to their greatest advantage, they are only expressed in the same dark and imperfect manner; and by consequence, whatever strength of words and ornaments of eloquence are employed to represent such truths, we must always form this judgment, that they are infinitely greater in themselves than they are represented: Because the ideas we have of them come undoubtedly very short of their real objects; and our expressions being but the painting of our ideas, and, as it were, second-hand copies of the objects themselves, must needs represent them at least as imperfectly as they are conceived in our thoughts.

This reflection therefore must be carried on through every part of the subject I am now entering upon. The word of God itself tells us of the joys of Heaven, *that the eye has not seen, neither has the ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what God has prepared for those that love him.* And the same must be said of the pains of hell, prepared for them that live and die in the state of sin. It is impossible to conceive, much less to express, either the one or the other. Our faith must supply the defect of our understanding, and convince us, that as no joy or pleasure of this world can bear any proportion to that of the blessed souls in Heaven, so the acutest pains that ever were or can be endured in this life are but imaginary ones, and not worth speaking of, if compared with the torments of the damned in hell.

I shall begin with these, according to the method of spiritual writers, who usually consider them under two general heads, called by divines the *pain of sense* and the *pain of loss*. Under the first head are contained all evils that affect the senses; and under the second, all interior pains of the soul caused by *grief, anguish, despair, shame, hatred, envy*, and the *violent cravings* of passions never to be satisfied. I shall now speak only of the *pain of sense*, in general; and since a person dying in the state of sin is from that very instant condemned to *hell-fire*, which causes the most grievous pain of that sort, I shall endeavour to shew that a damned soul suffers the pain of sense independently of the re-union of the body; and is, by consequence, the fuel of *hell-fire*, as well before as after the general resurrection: which shall be the subject of this Entertainment.

According to the vulgar way of thinking, we are apt to fancy that we should easily form some idea of the *pain of sense*, if the soul immediately after death were again united to the body. But we have a difficulty to conceive, how this sort of pain is consistent with the state of separation. For the pain of sense is no other, than that which we suffer by all or some one of our five senses; and how can the soul be capable of sensation, when she is stript of all the natural organs of her senses? Can she see without eyes, hear without ears, feel without flesh and blood, and soforth? But this difficulty is chiefly owing to a want of true ideas of the different natures of the soul and body, the two parts whereof man is composed.

First, then, as to the body, we must consider, that this part of man, even whilst it is informed and animated by the soul, is nothing but *mere matter*, as having been originally formed of earth; and mere matter can never be a principle of *life* any more than a log of wood, nor by consequence of *sensation*. But the soul is a spiritual substance, created immediately by the hand of God, and is itself the sole principle both of *sensation* and *reason*. Hence both spiritual and scholastic writers conceive two different parts in the soul; one of which they call the *inferior*, or *sensitive* part; the other, the *superior* or *rational* part; which is a manifest proof of their attributing *sensation* as well as *reasoning* to the soul alone. However, their meaning is not that there are two parts really distinct in the soul, but only two different denominations attributed to the same spiritual substance, as

she is the root or principle both of *sensitive* and *intellectual* operations, in whatever state she be, and whether she acts in conjunction with or separately from the body.

It is true, Almighty God has ordered human nature so, that the soul, during her state of union in this life, shall not be capable of any exercise, either of her intellectual or sensitive faculties, without the ministry of the body; so that as a man can neither think nor reason without brains, so neither can she *see*, nor *hear*, nor *feel*, nor *taste*, nor *smell*, without the respective *organs*, made by the author of nature to be subservient to these *sensitive* operations.

But though the soul be thus made to depend upon the ministry of the body, and is without it unable in this world to exert herself in any functions of life, whether *sensation* or *reason*, yet this is but an accidental condition of her present state, but no part of her essence. For the soul is essentially a spiritual substance, unalterable in her nature, and the several parts of the body are but her tools and instruments to work with in this life. When that is ended, she changes not her essence, but her state; as a man who throws off his clothes or shackles, is the same human nature he was before. And therefore as the soul, whilst united to the body, is by her essence and nature the sole principle, not only of *intellectual* but of all *vital* and *sensitive* operations; since the body only furnishes the material organs adapted to her present state of conjunction with it; it follows, that after their separation, whilst the body, according to its corruptible nature, returns to earth, the soul cannot but continue to be what she is by essence, the same source and principle both of *reason* and *sensation*.

This is manifest, as to the *intellectual* part of the soul, since both philosophers and divines agree, that her intellectual powers act with much greater strength and vivacity in her state of separation, than they can possibly do under the clog and incumbrances of the body. The same is no less evident as to the sense of *feeling*. For no man of sound principles doubts, but that a damned soul is tormented by *hell-fire*, from the very instant of her condemnation; and it is manifested from the words of the *rich glutton* in hell. But if the soul, separated from the body, had no sense of *feeling*, hell-fire could not torment her. For let it be ever so violent or active in its nature, it cannot be a cause of pain, unless it acts upon a subject that can feel it: And,

therefore, since there is no reason to doubt, but that the soul separated from the body had no sense of *feeling*, there seems to be as little reason to doubt, but that the sensitive powers, namely, those of *hearing*, *seeing*, *smelling*, and *tasting*, are likewise inseparable from her essence; though their respective functions be doubtless performed after a different manner, according to the difference of her immaterial and incorruptible state, into which she enters immediately after her dissolution.

So that if any one asks me, how the soul can *see* without *eyes*, or *hear* without *ears*, and of the rest; I answer him, by asking, likewise, how she can *think*, *understand*, and *reason*, without brains? since there appears no greater difficulty in the one than in the other? In effect, all the difficulty that appears, arises wholly from an error of imagination in attributing that to the body, which really belongs to the soul, when they are united together. For we imagine the organs of the senses to be the senses themselves, which I conceive to be a great mistake. The organs of sensation are indeed in the body, but the sensation itself is in the soul. And though, according to the vulgar way of speaking, we say that the eyes see, and the ears hear, yet the *eyes* and *ears* are no more the senses of *seeing* and *hearing*, than the windows, through which the light passes, are the light itself; for the true meaning of it is no other, than that the ideas of the respective objects of *sight* and *hearing* are conveyed to the soul through the eyes and ears, as the light of the sun is conveyed to us through the windows.

It is true, indeed, that according to the condition of the soul in this life, material objects cannot make impressions upon us, or affect us either with pain or pleasure, otherwise than by making their way to the soul by the ministry of the corporeal organs: But the radical source itself, both of seeing, hearing, and other sensations, which are all operations of life, is inherent in the soul alone, is a part of her very substance, and so imbibed in her nature as to be inseparable from it.

This is not all—but we must farther observe, that the soul, whilst she is united to, and acts in conjunction with the body, is by all spiritual writers, considered as under a state of *confinement*. The body is usually called her *prison*, and all those numberless organical parts, on which she depends, both in her sensitive and intellectual capacity, are to

be considered no otherwise than as so many *chains* or *shackles*, which cramp her natural powers, and hinder them from exerting themselves with their full vivacity and strength. They are, indeed, of necessary use with relation to her present state; but it is like the use of crutches to a cripple.—For the soul, united to the body, cannot indeed move or act without them; as a cripple, during his state of infirmity, cannot walk without crutches. But her state of union is a state of weakness, and as long as it lasts, all the motions and operations of the soul are lame, weak, and languid. But as a cripple restored to the natural use of his limbs, moves with much greater strength and swiftness than whilst he is confined to crutches: so when the soul is delivered by death from the chains and incumbrance of the body, all her powers are, as it were, set at liberty: She acts without restraint, and exerts herself with the utmost extent of her natural force. Her understanding is enlarged, to give her a full knowledge of her eternal state, and of every thing that contributes to render it happy or unhappy. All her ideas are clear and distinct; because the objects that excite them meet with no interpositions of matter, to clog or weaken the impressions they make upon her. They act upon her immediately, without being obliged to force their way through flesh and blood to come at her; so that all her sensations and movements are attended with an acuteness and violence, far superior to what she can have in this world; and (if I may be allowed to make use of a familiar comparison,) we may truly say, that as blows are more sensible and painful to a naked body, than to one covered with thick clothes, so the pains of a soul, stripped naked of the body, are infinitely more acute and violent than any she can here endure, under the gross and material cover of flesh and blood.

From these reflections it follows, that by a wonderful providential disposition of divine justice, every part or faculty of the soul will, even in her state of separation, be a distinct source of some accidental increase of punishment or reward, according as it has been a source of virtuous or sinful actions in this life; and all her sensitive, as well as intellectual powers, will have their share of torment or pleasure exactly proportioned to the sins or virtues, of which they were made instruments upon earth.

I will not indeed pretend to explain either the particular

manner, how the soul exerts her sensitive powers in her state of separation, or the nature of the objects that work upon her, or the manner how they affect her either with pain or pleasure. For though the knowledge of these things might serve to gratify our curiosity, they are not necessary for our instruction, or clearer information of the truth; it suffices, in this as well as many other cases, to know that it is a truth, grounded upon solid principles of reason. But the *how*, or manner of it, is a subject of mere barren speculation, and nothing to the main purpose: It suffices, for example, to be convinced, that a damned soul separated from the body, is tormented by hell-fire, and that by consequence she feels the violence and activity of the flames that torment her; but as to the nature of hell-fire, as whether it be true elemental fire, or of a different sort from what we know in this world; or as to the manner how it acts upon a spiritual substance, or how a soul unorganized can be a proper fuel for it; these are mere amusements of human curiosity, and indeed above the reach of our understanding.

Nay, we are almost as much in the dark concerning the manner how we *see*, *hear*, or *feel* in this life; for the very wisest men differ in their opinions about it: Some say, we *see* by the emission of rays from the eyes; others explain it by the reception of species from the objects: and there is the same uncertainty about the manner of sensation of all the other senses: and indeed all we are sure of is, that we see with our eyes, hear with our ears, and so of the rest.—And, therefore, as it would be a madness to doubt of it, because we know not how to explain it, so none but madmen can doubt of hell-fire, or the grievousness of the torment it causes in damned souls, because we cannot comprehend the *how*, or manner of it. I heartily pray God, we may never be made sensible of it by an experimental knowledge.

But what I have said concerning the nature of man's soul, seems to amount to a convincing proof, that the *pain of sense* in a damned soul is the same in both her states after this life; that is, as well before as after the re-union of the body; and this I find conformable to the sentiment of all spiritual writers upon this subject; who in explaining the pain of sense, never give the least hint, as if the proper pain of any of the senses were suspended to the general resurrection; on the contrary, their usual method is to be very particular in specifying all the different torments of the five senses, and ap-

propriating to each one a punishment suitable to the nature of the sins, whereof it has been an instrument in this life; and this without mentioning any difference between her state of separation from, or re-union to the body, or exempting a damned soul from any sensible pain in one state, with which she is to be tormented in the other.

In effect, whoever allows the soul to have a sense of feeling in her state of separation, must allow her all her other senses, since there is the same reason for all as for one: And therefore, since it is above all question, that one part of her pain of sense, viz. her burning in hell commences from the very instant of her condemnation; there is likewise no reason to doubt, but that all the other senses have their share of torment assigned them from the very same moment. And this seems also to be most conformable to that exact equality of justice, which God exercises in the other world.

For, the very moment that a person expires, he ceases to be in a state of meriting or demeriting; that is, from that moment he cannot do any thing to deserve the least increase or diminution, either of punishment or reward: that very moment also his sentence is pronounced, which being infinitely just, must by consequence be exactly proportioned to the number and quality of all his past sins or virtues; allowing likewise for all their consequences, of which God has a perfect knowledge. If, therefore, the punishment of a person condemned to hell-fire were augmented, after the general resurrection, by some additional pain of sense, it would follow, that it would then either exceed the measure of his past sins, or not come fully up to it in the interval between his death and the great day of general judgment. And since this seems to be inconsistent with the most obvious notion of an infinite justice, we must conclude, that the *pain of sense*, as well as that of *loss*, is in its full measure allotted to every damned soul at her very first plunge into hell-fire; and that, though after the re-union of the body, the manner of it may be different, (concerning which we are wholly in the dark,) the substance and violence of her pains are as fixed and unchangeable as her eternal state.

Let us beseech Almighty God to grant us the spirit of true penance in this life, particularly in the mortification of our senses. The dangerous liberties and unlawful pleasures we allow them now, will cost us very dear hereafter: but if we labour to subdue them in this life; if we subject them to

the government of reason, and make them subservient to virtue, they will also be partakers of the incomprehensible joys prepared for us in the life to come.

FOURTEENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

A PARTICULAR ACCOUNT OF THE PAIN OF SENSE.

Cast him into the exterior darkness: There shall be weeping, and gnashing of teeth. Matt. xxii. 13.

In my last discourse I entertained you with some general considerations relating to the *pain of sense;* I shall now proceed to give you a more particular account of it; and this shall be the subject of this Entertainment.

That part of the punishment of the damned, which is called the *pain of sense*, is principally called by the nature of the *place*, where the damned souls are imprisoned, and the unquenchable *flames* to which they are condemned.

As to the *place* assigned them for their eternal abode, which we call *hell*, it is unquestionably under ground, and very probably in the very centre or bowels of the earth.—St. John, in his Revelations, calls it the *Lake of God's Wrath.* The prophet Isaiah calls it *Tophet*, and gives this frightful description of it. *From eternity*, (says he,) *is Tophet prepared by the King*, (meaning Almighty God;) *he has made it deep and large: The pile thereof is fire, and much wood. The breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it.* And holy Job calls it *a land of darkness, covered with the gloomy shade of death, where no order, but eternal horror and confusion dwelleth.*

Now these descriptions are mostly suitable to the nature of a subterraneous place, or prison, under ground. *Deepness* denotes its situation; and *darkness, confusion* and *horror*, are the natural consequences of it. There are, besides, many other expressions in holy writ, which favour this belief; as that of the Psalmist, *Let them descend alive into hell.* And it is related of the rich glutton, *that he died, and was buried in hell:* Which expressions, viz. *descending into*, and being *buried in hell*, naturally form in us an idea of a place beneath the surface of the earth, and far distant from the seat of bliss.

Of which we have still a farther insinuation in the words of our *creed*, though the *hell* there spoken of be very dif-

ferent from that of the damned: The words I mean are these: *He descended into Hell: The third day he rose again, he ascended into Heaven*, &c. For a person cannot properly be said to *descend*, but from a higher place to a lower; nor to *ascend*, but from a lower place to one respectively higher: so that the surface of the earth is here represented as in a middle situation, between the region of darkness below, and the mansions of eternal light above: and since we cannot doubt but these are full as opposite in their situation, as nature, we may confidently say, that the Heaven of the blessed souls is the very highest, and the hell of the damned the very lowest part of the whole creation: and that as the elevation of the one will give an encrease of accidental glory to the elect, so will the lowness of the other cause an addition of torment and confusion in the reprobate.

But the reason, whence it chiefly appears, that the *hell of the damned* is not only a place under ground, but in the very lowest caverns of the earth, is, because the *hell*, into which Christ descended, was a subterraneous place, as I have already remarked; and according to these words of the apostle, *For who is he who ascended, but he who descended first into the lower parts of the earth?* And yet the hell of the damned is still much lower than this, as appears from the history or parable of the *rich glutton*, who demanding of Abraham a drop of water to cool his tongue, was answered by him, that there was a great gulph or space between them, which debarred the damned from receiving, and him from sending any comfort, from the place where he and Lazarus made their abode; which doubtless was the hell or *prison* of the saints of the old law, into which our Saviour Christ descended, in order to release those holy captives, whom he had ransomed with his sacred blood, of which the unhappy glutton could receive no benefit; because *in hell*, (namely, *the hell of the damned,*) there is *no redemption.*

If you ask how man's soul, which is a spiritual substance, can be confined to, or imprisoned in a material place? I answer, that there is no more difficulty to conceive the soul imprisoned in a *material place*, than to conceive her imprisoned in a *material body*. We all know that the body is the *prison* of the soul in this life: and the body is originally but earth turned into flesh, which after death returns into earth. So that a soul, condemned to Hell, is but removed from one

earthly prison to another; that is, from a prison above ground, where goods and evils, joys and sorrows, pleasures, and pains, are continually interwoven, to one under ground, where a dreadful aggregation of all imaginable evil is to be her everlasting portion.

For in the prison of this world she sees the beautiful light of the sun, is refreshed by the air, and enjoys the comfort of the other elements: her senses are entertained with many agreeable objects, her sorrows are alleviated by the company of friends, her cares diverted by a great variety of amusements, and the repose of night not only suspends her labours, but supplies her with new strength to support them. But in the prison of the other world, every thing contributes to torment her: the very depth and darkness of the place affects her with horror. She has all the pain of a person buried alive, and stifled under the weight of the earth, without the power of dying; the extremities, both of heat and cold, the apparitions of frightful spectres, the gnawings of serpents, and other venomous creatures, according to St. Austin; finally, the confused noise of curses and blasphemies, howlings and lamentations, are the everlasting entertainment of her senses; without the least interval of repose, without a friend to comfort her, or any change of objects to divert her from her torments.

So that we must conceive the hell of the damned to be a dreadful dungeon, separated from all light and air by the whole thickness of the earth, which immures it, as it were, on every part: a dungeon filled with horror, filth, and noisome stenches, and impenetrable to all relief. In a word, a dungeon, where those unfortunate criminals are to be kept prisoners for all eternity; where they will be everlasting objects of God's wrath, the eternal victims of his justice, the hatred and aversion of saints and angels, and the scorn and derision of their implacable tormentors.

But of all the pains of sense, that which is caused by hell-fire is the most grievous; and the truth of it is so authentically attested in holy writ, that no man of sound principles can doubt of it. *Fire and brimstone*, (says the royal prophet,) *shall be a part of their cup. Their worm*, (says Isaiah,) *shall never die, and their fire shall never be quenched: Whoever* (says St. John, in his Revelations,) *was not found written in the book of life, was thrown into a pool of fire:* and the holy Baptist made use of no other argument,

to induce his auditors to embrace the baptism of penance he preached. *The axe* (says he,) *is already laid to the root: Therefore, every tree that brings not forth good fruit shall be cut down, and cast into the fire. He will gather,* (speaking of our Saviour,) *his wheat into his granary, but he will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.* All which is confirmed by Christ himself, saying, that in the last day he will pronounce this terrible sentence against the reprobate. *Go ye accursed into everlasting fire, which is prepared for the devil and his angels.*

Can any thing be clearer or stronger than these expressions of holy writ? which therefore the fathers, and other spiritual writers, ever understood in their obvious and literal sense; and they always took care to inculcate, that the fire prepared for sinners is a true and real fire; which they therefore call the chief minister of God's wrath; the avenger of his cause, the principal agent, instrument, and executioner of the divine justice. And St. Austin sticks not to say, that the fire of this world, compared to that of hell, is no more than a *painted fire.*

Now of all sensible pains, that which is caused by fire, even in this world, is generally esteemed one of the most violent and insupportable. All men have a strong and lively apprehension of it: insomuch, that there is scarce any death we naturally dread more than to be burnt alive, especially by a slow fire; which, therefore, never is inflicted but for the most enormous crimes, or by tyrants who have lost all sense of humanity. Would any one here present have the courage to hold his hand for one-half hour upon a burning coal, though he were to gain a kingdom by it? I dare say there is not any one, though ever so poor, but would rather choose to continue what he is, than purchase a change of condition at so dear a rate. And therefore we justly admire the heroic virtue of St. Lawrence, who whilst he lay broiling on a gridiron, rejoiced in his torments, and seemed insensible of the pain he endured. But nature had no share in this action, and he would doubtless have sunk under the excessive violence of the pain, had not the invincible power of divine grace rendered him victorious over it.

If then the fire, even of this world, causes a pain so grievous and intolerable, that no man would, upon any worldly consideration, endure the violence of it for any space of time, how shall we find words to express the grievousness

of the pain which the damned endure amidst the scorching flames of hell! Since all spiritual writers affirm positively, that the violence and activity of hell-fire surpasses beyond all imagination that of any fire in this world! Truly, we may say, without exaggeration, that even the *Babylonian furnace* though kindled seven times more than usually, was rather a refreshing gale than burning fire, if compared with the flames of hell; and that St. Laurence's gridiron would be a bed of roses to a damned soul.

The reason of this terrible difference is partly the nature of hell-fire itself, considered as an instrument of divine justice, and partly the nature or condition of the subject upon which it acts. As to the first, viz. the nature of hell-fire considered as an *instrument of divine justice* we must observe, that whereas fire in this world was principally ordained by God, to *comfort*, *warm*, and *refresh*; hell-fire was on the contrary kindled by him for no other use than to *burn* and *torment*. And since there is not any part of the whole creation, that comes within our knowledge, but is by his infinite wisdom perfectly adapted to the peculiar use for which it is ordained, and endowed with a nature suitable to the part it has to act, in serving the designs of the Creator, we have reason to conclude, that the same infinite wisdom has also given to hell-fire such a nature and qualities, as fully answer the ends for which they are made; which being no other than to punish and torment the wicked with the utmost rigour, it is not to be questioned but Almighty God has communicated to it an impetuosity and violence, which surpasses every thing in this world, and is most lively expressed by the prophet Isaiah, saying, that hell-fire is blown upon and kindled by the breath of the Lord. To which St. Austin likewise alludes, when he says, that hell-fire burns marvellously but truly, *miris sed veris modis*.

God is indeed marvellous in all his works. But we may truly say, that of all his works, none appear more wonderful than his boundless liberality in Heaven, and the rigour of his justice in Hell. In Heaven, he rewards like a God, and in Hell he punishes like a God. In Heaven he bestows blessings without measure, and in Hell he inflicts torments without mercy. His infinite wisdom and power are employed in Heaven to make the blessed souls completely happy, in all the demonstrations of his infinite goodness, and

they are no less employed in Hell to make the damned souls smart under the rigour of his justice. And whereas all God's works in this world are a mixture of *justice* and *mercy*, in the life to come they are all pure justice in relation to the reprobate: For in this life, indeed, when he chastises, he does it with the tenderness of a loving father: but in the life to come he punishes the reprobate like an irreconcilable enemy that takes revenge, or like a judge that treats a criminal according to the rigour of the law; which made holy Job, though his sufferings were so great that he seemed utterly abandoned by God, express his condition by only saying, that *the hand of the Lord had touched him*, because the very severest sufferings in this world are but, as it were, some *gentle touches* of the hand of God; whereas he makes the reprobates in Hell feel the whole weight of his terrible hand, giving his wrath full scope, and pouring forth his indignation upon them like an impetuous torrent. So that we may consider hell-fire as a dreadful instrument of execution, in the hand of an incensed and implacable God, revenging himself with it, according to the full impetuosity and violence of its nature.

But the second reason of the excessive torment it causes, is the nature or quality of the subject upon which it acts. For, in the first place, there is nothing in the damned that can any way resist or weaken its activity: And therefore, the word of God compares them to *dry wood*, *stubble*, or *straw;* because, fire meets with little or no resistance in things of this nature; as is evident from experience. Now it is certain that the less the resistance is of the subject, to which fire is applied, the greater is the impetuosity and violence, with which it acts upon it; and consequently where there is no resistance at all, it acts upon it with its full force.

But the incorruptibleness of the damned is another frightful circumstance, which may help to give us some idea of the excessive violence of their torments. For in this world, all manner of pain is limited by the mortality and weakness of our bodies; because, whenever any pain exceeds a certain degree or measure of violence beyond what nature can bear, it utterly destroys us. But in hell, things are not so; because the most excessive torments can neither destroy nor alter the subject upon which hell-fire acts. And therefore as the pains of the damned will be without end, because

the subject will never be destroyed, so will they also be without diminution or abatement, because the incorruptibleness of their state renders them incapable of change. So that after millions of millions of years, passed in those fiery dungeons and furnaces of unquenchable flames, the damned will have as quick and feeling sense of the fire, as they had the very first moment. In a word, all their torments, though violent beyond expression or imagination, will continue in their full degree of violence as long as hell-fire shall last, which will be for all eternity; ever burning without consuming, ever tormenting without altering or destroying any part of the miserable fuel upon which it acts.

I need not add any more, but leave every one to reflect, whether considering the continual uncertainty of human life, we act not like madmen if we continue for any time in a state, from which, if death carries us to the other world, we are sure to pass to the dreadful torments I have described. Let us beseech Almighty God, to preserve us from this blindness, and give us grace to live so, that a happy eternity may be our reward.

FIFTEENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

ON THE PAIN OF LOSS.

Their worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished.
Mark ix. 43.

By the *worm*, which *dieth not*, is meant the everlasting and gnawing of conscience, and the anguish and despair of a damned soul, caused by the unhappy state into which she is fallen. For the better understanding whereof, we must consider that a man's soul is created to be happy. And since all creatures have a natural tendency to the end for which they are created, it follows that a general inclination to happiness is so imbibed in the nature of the soul, whatever state she be in, that it is inseparable from it. In effect, the principal view men have in all the hurry and business of life, is no other than to make themselves as happy as they can, and whether honour, interest, or pleasure be the immediate object of their pursuits, happiness is the principal and ultimate end they aim at.

This inclination, therefore, being inseparable from the very nature and essence of man's soul, not only follows her

to the other world, but by her being then disengaged from the incumbrance of flesh and blood, becomes far more violent and craving: and by consequence, if a soul at her separation from the body, finds herself utterly deprived of the happiness after which she thirsts, the same inclination, which if gratified in the possession of an infinite good, would have rendered her infinitely happy, renders her infinitely miserable in the loss of it, and becomes a perpetual food of the *worm, which dieth not;* I mean, of that terrible part of her punishment, which divines call the pain of *loss*, and which I intend to explain in this Entertainment.

Though the picture I have hitherto drawn of Hell be very frightful, it represents but one half, and the milder part of the punishment of a damned soul; since divines in general agree, that the pain of *loss* is far more grievous than that of *sense*. This pain consists principally in the violent impressions of grief, made upon the soul for the loss of Heaven, and the unhappy state into which she has fallen. Now, whoever has at any time been under any great oppression and load of grief, will at least be sensible, that the pain of the mind is a very grievous torment, and suffices alone to render a person unhappy, though the body be perfectly at ease. So that there is this great difference between the sufferings of the mind, and those of the body, that though the body be ever so much afflicted, a cheerful and easy mind gives it relief. But a heart oppressed with grief feels the whole weight of its affliction, which, even in this world, where the objects that excite it are usually inconsiderable in themselves, becomes notwithstanding many times so heavy and insupportable, that many have laid violent hands on themselves to be delivered from it.

But the strongest proof that can be given of the violent pain, which grief alone can cause in the soul, is our Saviour's agony in the garden of Gethsemani; where he suffered himself to be seized with the heaviest load of grief, that ever fell upon any mortal man: insomuch, that many writers are of opinion, that it was the most painful part of all his sufferings; and Christ himself made this declaration of it, *that his soul was sorrowful, even unto death:* that is, the grief that oppressed his heart was so great, that had he not miraculously preserved himself for the death of the cross, nature could not have subsisted under the weight of it. But though he had not expressed it in words, the extraordinary

effect it wrought upon his sacred body, by throwing him into a sweat of blood, would have been a convincing proof of the violence of his pain.

I have produced this, only as an instance to convince us, that the interior pain of the soul, in which the senses have no share, may be a very grievous suffering: it is true, indeed, there never was, nor never can be any grief in this world, equal to what our Saviour suffered; because the ideas that excited it were infinitely clearer and stronger, than any other mortal man is capable of. But there is a large difference between what a man is capable of in this life, and the grief of a damned soul; whereof there appear three principal roots or causes. *First*, the unmixed nature of the afflicting objects, which excite and nourish the passions of a damned soul. 2*dly*, the clear idea she has of those afflicting objects. And 3*dly*, the unchangeableness of her nature, when she enters into her eternal state. I shall touch briefly upon each.

First then, the objects that occasion her grief in this life, are either inconsiderable trifles, or imaginary evils, or if real ones, are never without some mixture of comfort, and may be regarded on their favourable side: for there is scarce a temporal evil, but is counter-balanced by some good, to support an afflicted mind: if we lose one friend, others remain to make up the loss in some measure. If we be hated by some, a great number have a kindness, or at least an indifference for us: when one part of the body is in pain, the rest may be at ease; and so it is proportionably in all the sufferings of this life: no man's case is so utterly destitute and forlorn, as to be under a total privation of all comfort to alleviate his grief.

But matters are not so in the other world. The loss of Heaven in regard of a damned soul, is an infinite and universal loss: a loss which excludes all mixture of good, and comprehends an aggregation of all evils. For a damned soul is deprived of every thing she desires, and condemned to every thing she abhors. She is tormented in all her powers and senses. She is hated by all, and pited by none; hated not only by God, and all his saints and angels, but even by those who are to be the everlasting companions of her torments. So that, what way soever she turns herself, she sees no object before her but what is a real and substantial evil: No object but what is an everlasting source

of pain: finally, no object but what contributes to heighten her grief.

But the clear and full knowledge which a soul separated from the body, has of all those afflicting objects, is a second terrible circumstance, which raises her grief, and other painful passions to the highest pitch of violence: the body in this world is as a dead weight upon the soul; all her ideas of things, both temporal and eternal, are extremely weakened and obscured by it: and the extent of her understanding is reduced within a very narrow compass, as we plainly experience in this life. But she is no sooner disengaged from the clog and encumbrance of the body, but the dark mist that hung before her is dissipated in a moment. She is like a person starting from a profound sleep: her understanding is enlarged to a prodigious degree; and her ideas depending now no more on a deluded imagination, or the deceitful information of sensitive organs, are all clear and distinct, in relation to every thing that contributes to her happiness or torment. And what a dreadful load of grief will this cast upon a reprobate soul, when all the circumstances of her unhappy state, all the causes of it, which depended upon her own free will, and irreparable consequences that attend it, are clearly represented before her eyes.

The force of this consequence will appear evident, if we consider, that the passion of grief, and other painful passions, are all but so many violent movements and agitations in the soul, excited by the ideas of such objects as are disagreeable to us. For as we can neither *love* nor *desire* anything, but as we conceive it to be some *good*, so can we neither *hate* nor *fear* anything, nor *grieve* for it, unless we regard it as an *evil*. And, by consequence, the clearer our ideas are of the objects which excite our passions, the more violent are the movements or agitations, which they cause in the soul; as, on the contrary, weak ideas, even of objects of the most weighty consequence, make but weak impressions on the soul: as will appear beyond dispute from this single instance.

If we had a clear idea in this world, of the inestimable value of sanctifying grace, our loss of it by any mortal sin would afflict us in so violent a manner, that we should certainly die with grief: nature would be unable to subsist under the weight of it. In like manner, if we had a clear idea of *heavenly beatitude*, we should be inconsolable in be-

ing separated from it, even for one single moment: nothing in this world would have any power to effect us with pleasure, nor yield us any manner of satisfaction. But it is the encumbrance of corruptible flesh and blood, that weakens and obscures our ideas of spiritual things; and the weakness of our ideas renders us so stupid, that neither the loss of an inestimable good, nor our banishment in this vale of tears, affects us with any sensible grief; and we are even forced to have recourse to the help of natural means, as reading and meditating upon certain truths, to work ourselves up to a tolerable sense of what would otherwise overwhelm us with anguish, if we had a true and clear idea of the unhappiness of our state. So that it is not the nature of the objects only, though ever so afflicting in themselves, but chiefly the light in which they are represented, that excites our grief. But when both are joined together, and the most afflicting objects are represented to us, in the strongest and clearest light that is possible, the grief they cause must needs be violent and painful beyond imagination.

Now this will help to lead us to some notion of that violent grief of a damned soul, which we call the *pain of loss.* We must therefore consider, that the soul of a sinner dying in the state of mortal sin, is no sooner separated from the body, but she has a full and clear idea of the dignity of her nature, of the infinite happiness for which she was created, and the emptiness of those things, for the love of which she has forfeited her title to it. She knows then, clearly, what it is to be made to the image and likeness of God; how great and noble the character of a Christian is, and to what degree she has dishonoured that character, and debased herself by the actions of her life past. She knows then, clearly, that nothing less than the possession of an infinite good can make her happy; that she had once as good a title to it as any saint in Heaven; that it depended upon her own free will to secure it for ever; that she had forfeited it for mere trifles, for things of no value, and that the loss is utterly irreparable. At the same time, she has the most violent inclination in her nature to be happy, but sees herself reduced to a state in every circumstance diametrically opposite to it.

Oh, what a dreadful load of *grief* and *anguish*, what *shame* and *confusion*, what *rage* and *despair*, must all these afflicting ideas cause in an unfortunate soul, especially when

they carry with them a conviction, that leaves no room for any palliation or excuse! *Grief* and *anguish*, for the loss of an infinite happiness; *shame*, for having lost it by her own fault, when she might have secured it with the greatest ease; *confusion*, for having lost it for pleasures beneath the dignity of her nature; and, finally, *rage* and *despair*, to see herself justly doomed to endless and unspeakable torments, without the least hope of ever receiving any comfort or mitigation of her pains; because the incorruptibility of her nature, and unchangeableness of her state, render her utterly incapable of it, and add the weight of *eternity* to every part and circumstance of her unhappy condition.

This leads me to the third remarkable difference, relating to the nature of grief in this world, and that of a soul suffering independently of the body. For the condition of a soul confined to the body, renders her subject to many natural necessities, without which life cannot subsist; we must eat, and drink, and sleep, to support it. Besides, a great part of our time is divided between the cares, employments, and amusements, incident to every state; and all these things contribute to divert the soul from attending to the object which excites and nourishes her grief; because they naturally introduce many new ideas, either of agreeable or indifferent objects, which interrupt her melancholy thoughts from time to time; and though they return again, they seldom represent the afflicting objects in the same disagreeable light, and, by consequence, make a weaker impression than they did at first; which also wears off gradually with the frequency of interruptions. And thus it is, that time seldom fails to be a cure even for the most obstinate grief in this life.

But things are quite otherwise in the life to come; for a soul separated from the body is no longer subject to any of its natural necessities, nor diverted from one thought to another by variety of objects. Hence the thoughts or ideas which a damned soul has in the moment of her condemnation, can never be changed nor interrupted; because there is nothing either within her nor about her that can occasion any such change or interruption of thoughts, nor by consequence represent things to her in a different light, at one time, from what they appear to her at another: No, Christians, the ideas of a damned soul are always equally clear, equally strong, equally convincing; and what she thinks

once, she never ceases to think of. The rigour, justice, and eternity of her pains are always present to her thoughts, and always in the manner as at the moment of her separation from the body. And, by consequence, the impressions of grief, which those frightful ideas of her having lost heaven, and lost it by her own free will, and lost it without remedy; the impressions, I say, which they make upon her in the first moment of her entrance into hell, must of necessity continue in the same degree of violence for all eternity.

Now, what has been said concerning the passion of grief, must be applied to all the other passions of an unfortunate soul: I mean, her *shame*, *rage*, *despair*, *envy*, *hatred*, and the like. For, as the objects which excite and nourish these passions, always are, and always appear the same, so the several impressions, movements and agitations, which they produce, must likewise be the same for ever; as is farther confirmed from this clear reason. For if a damned soul could change her ideas, or pass from one object to another, her condition would be sometimes more, sometimes less painful, according to the nature of the objects that should work upon her. But since she is always equally criminal, the law of justice seems to demand, that she be always equally punished.

Oh, what a deplorable state is it, to be for all eternity in the power of the most cruel and merciless tyrants! to be for ever oppressed with unspeakable grief, tortured with rage and despair, and burning with desires which will never be gratified! Yet this is the case of every damned soul, in proportion to the measure of sins committed in this life. For as every mortal sin plunges a soul deeper into hell-fire, and removes her farther from the possession of God, so it heaps upon her an additional increase of *grief*, *shame*, and *despair*; and the more grievous her torments are, the more she *envies* the happiness of the saints, and *hates* the infinite justice of God, which inflicts them upon her.

Now then let us take a short review of all the circumstances of the unhappy state I have described. Let us consider a spiritual and immortal soul, noble in her nature, and little inferior to angels: A soul, created to enjoy a crown of glory, banished for ever from the sight of God, and shut up within a dark and hideous dungeon under ground. 2*dly*, Let us consider her thirsting ardently after

joys and pleasures, and doomed to everlasting torments of unquenchable flames. *Lastly*, Let us consider her without the least power of helping herself, abandoned to the heaviest load of grief, and the fury of all her other passions, acting incessantly upon her with their utmost rage and violence, and making her suffer all the pangs and agonies of a thousand deaths, yet abandoned by death itself, which, when all comforts fail, is a sure refuge for grief and pain in this life. Then let us make this short reflection, but let us make it with a serious attention, whether the pleasures of sin will not cost us a great deal too dear one day, if we take not timely care to expiate them with true penitential tears.

Oh, let us grieve now, that we may not grieve for ever. Let us weep in time, that we may not weep for all eternity. But let us not throw away our tears upon mere trifles. The sins we have already committed, and which we are still in danger of committing, demand and deserve them all. We weep for a dead friend, and our tears cannot bring him to life again; whereas if our souls be dead in sin, we may restore them to life with tears of penance: Heaven lost may be redeemed by them. This is the principal use for which they are designed, by the author of nature; and if we make this use of them, they will most certainly prevent the eternal but useless tears of the life to come, and be a source of everlasting comfort to our souls.

SIXTEETNH ENTERTAINMENT.

REFLECTIONS UPON THE PAINS OF HELL.

Which of you can dwell with devouring fire? Which of you can dwell with everlasting burnings? Isa. xxxiii. 14.

THOUGH the truths I have delivered concerning the everlasting torments of Hell be very frightful, they will be of no use to us unless we make our reflections upon them, and draw consequences from them for the conduct of our lives. This therefore, shall be the subject of this Entertainment.

The reflection that first offers itself to my thoughts, arises from the consideration of the dreadful change of condition that befals a wretched creature, who having loved and enjoyed the pleasures of this world, and being still possessed with the same, nay, a far more violent passion for them, finds himself all on a sudden, plunged into everlasting tor-

ments. For if even the fall of great men in this world, be apt to overwhelm them with such a load of grief, as often sinks them into utter despair, how shall we find words to express, or ideas to conceive the horror, consternation, rage and despair that seize a person, who having wallowed in all the pleasures of voluptuous life, and indulged himself in every thing to the utmost of his power, now sees himself, in a moment, reduced not only to an utter privation of all his former enjoyments, but to a state of endless misery and torment! Oh, what a terrible change is this to pass from ease, conveniencies and pleasures, to eternal pains! From the gratifications of a sensual life, to scorching flames! In a word, from all that nature loves and admires, to a state made up of every thing she fears and abhors!

However, it would be some comfort in this dreadful turn of condition, if a damned soul had but had any hopes left, that there was still room for another change, though it were but after millions of years or ages. But what gives the heaviest aggravation to the unhappiness of his state, and completes his misfortune is the certain knowledge he has, that this is the last change he is ever like to see; the thought whereof being always present to his mind, is the food of that everlasting worm, which gnaws him without intermission, and never allows him the least glimpse of hope. He knows, alas, and to exclude all manner of comfort, is not permitted either to doubt, or cease thinking of it; he knows, I say, that the fiery dungeon to which he is condemned, is to be his everlasting habitation; that burning coals are to be his bed for ever; that fire and brimstone are the only air he is ever like to breathe; and that the cursed company in which he now finds himself, must always be the same: finally, that neither his eyes must ever see, nor his ears ever hear, nor his other senses be ever entertained with anything, but what the divine justice has ordained to be the instruments of his torments.

Saint Teresa, as she had a great stock of natural wit, joined with a strong and lively faith, has left us in her writings a most lively description of this dreadful change, of a person passing in an instant from a state of pleasures, grandeur, and esteem, to that of torments, ignominy and disgrace. "How shall I be able (says she) to express my grief, when I represent to my thoughts the condition of a person,

who having always seen himself considered in this world, always loved, always waited on, respected and caressed, shall in the moment of his death find himself lost for ever, and be clearly convinced that his sufferings will never end! Nay, that it will now avail him nothing, to seek to turn away his thoughts from the consideration of eternity, as he was wont to do in this life: when he shall see himself separated, and, as it were, torn away from all his divertisements and pleasures, even when he scarce thought he had begun to taste them; because whatever ends with life passes as a breath or vapour: when he shall see himself encompassed by that ghastly and cruel company, with which he must suffer for eternity: when he shall see himself thrown into a stinking pool, filled with serpents, that will exercise their utmost rage upon him: finally, when he shall see himself environed with that hideous darkness, which having no light but a gloomy flame, will only suffer him to see the instruments of his everlasting misery and torments! O God! How far short is what I say from the real truth! And who then blinded the eyes of that unfortunate soul to such a degree, as to hinder her from seeing that state of miseries, till she saw herself plunged into it for eternity! Who stopped her ears to that degree, as to render her deaf to the voice of those, who forewarned her a thousand times of the grievousness and eternity of those torments! O unhappy eternity! O torments without end or mitigation! Is it possible that those should not fear thee, who are even so afraid of the least bodily inconvenience, that they cannot endure to lie one single night on a bed that is not made easy for them!"

These were the lively ideas this saint had of the terrible change in the condition of a person passing from the joys of this life to the torments of the next.

But let us now consider, in the second place, how easy and delightful a penitential life would seem to a person under these unhappy circumstances, and how welcome a message it would be to him, if any one should come to let him know, that Almighty God would deliver him from that place of torments, provided he would but for a certain number of years consent to expiate his past sins by some rigorous penance. Oh, with what joy would he embrace the proposal! How would he pour himself forth in praises and thanksgivings for so signal a mercy! For what shadow of comparison is there between the least torment of Hell, and the greatest

hardship of a penitential life, especially considering the eternity of the one, and the short duration of the other!

Hence it is related in the lives of the Fathers in the Desarts, that a certain recluse, having been for some time very cold and negligent in the duties of his calling, and falling into a dangerous sickness, Almighty God was pleased to favour him with a vision of the torments of Hell; but being come to himself, and restored to health, he immediately ordered himself to be shut up within four walls, in which close prison he continued for the space of twelve years, in the continual practice of so severe a penance, that he was the astonishment of all that knew him; and being sometimes asked, why he condemned himself to so much rigour, he always answered, if they knew what he had seen, they would not wonder at what he did.

And truly, if we had a lively faith, either of the rewards or punishments of the life to come, we should be far from wondering, as we often do, at the undertaking of those holy men and women, who renouncing all the pleasures of this world, shut themselves up to become perpetual victims of penance. For though we may justly admire the power of God's grace in their resolution and constancy, in persevering for many years in a continual contradiction to their natural inclinations; yet if we consider at the same time the unspeakable torments, which may certainly be avoided by those penitential practices, we have no reason to be astonished, that those whose hearts are deeply penetrated with this truth, should choose any course of life, though ever so painful in itself, to secure themselves against evils that are infinitely greater. Nay, we must own, that this is even following the light of natural reason, and acting according to the dictates of a true christian self-love, if I may allowed to call it so.

Hence it is, that impenitent sinners are stiled *children, fools,* and *madmen,* by the word of God; because they act as irrationally in the concern of salvation, as if they were wholly destitute of sense and reason; since nothing can be more irrational, than to believe the everlasting torments of Hell, and not use all endeavours suitable to each one's respective state to avoid them. For which reason also the damned are represented by God's word condemning their past follies, in these remarkable words: *Senseless that we were we judged their lives madness;* to wit, the penitential

lives of holy men, whom they despised and looked upon as fools, because they acted not according to the wisdom of the world; whereas, poor wretches, they now experience, to their everlasting sorrow, that they themselves were the fools, and these they took for such were truly wise, in securing, while they had it in their power, their eternal interest, though with the loss of all things else.

But though all the circumstances of the change I have spoken of, viz. of a *rich man* passing from the pleasures of this life to the torments of the next, affords matter for the most melancholy reflections, there is something singularly unaccountable in the miscarriage of the *poor*. For when a rich man loses his soul, it is usually for sins by which corrupt nature is gratified in the most agreeable manner: he lives continually encompassed with a thousand snares and incentives to vice, because his wealth furnishes him with means to be at the expense of gratifying all the cravings of his inclinations: and though in so doing he really acts the part of a madman, because the present gratifications are infinitely disproportioned to the sufferings of his future state, yet considering the corruption and weakness of man's nature, it is less surprising to see him overcome by the strongest and most inviting allurements, than if none of these provocations to sin were before him.

When therefore a poor man loses his soul, there is scarce anything in nature to account for it, and we may say he damns himself purely *gratis*. The very poverty of his condition skreens him from the vices that are most alluring to human nature, as *ambition*, *luxury*, *intemperance*, *vanity*, and *worldly pleasures*, which usually damn the rich: Because all these vices being clogged with a continual expense to support them, are out of the reach of a man that is forced to labour for bread; and experience is a convincing proof, that want of opportunity is one of the most effectual securities against temptations. Besides, the very hand of Providence has put the poor in a way, which if they pursue but steadily, and with a constant eye upon the end to which it leads, cannot but bring them directly to a happy eternity.

And what then are the sins by which they usually forfeit that happiness to which they are entitled, both as *christians* and as *poor?* Their sins are such as a person acting rationally would avoid, though there were no prospect of a future happiness to induce him to it. For their very nature is

such as makes them become a perpetual vexation of spirit, keeps the mind upon the rack, and destroys all inward peace of mind, which is the only solid comfort of life: The sins I mean, are *envy*, *hatred*, *choler*, *fretting*, *murmurs*, and *discontents*. For it is by a long series of these uneasy and tormenting sins, that many pass from the miseries of this life to those of the next; whereas if they submitted with a cheerful resignation to the circumstances in which God has placed them, and bore the difficulties of their state, purely for the love of God, every thing would become tolerably easy in this life, and Heaven would be their everlasting inheritance hereafter. But by continually fretting and repining at their own condition, and envying that of their neighbour, or keeping malice in their hearts, they both double all the sufferings which God has sent them, and deprive themselves of the whole reward promised to those that bear them with a christian patience.

Now all this impatience, envy, murmuring, and repining, and indeed all other sins, are chiefly owing to a want of reflection, and our not drawing rational consequences from the faith we have of the infinite rewards and punishments of the life to come. For the very first practical consequence we ought to draw from this belief, is, that whatever is a means to preserve us from the torments of Hell, and bring us to the possession of the joys of Heaven, ought to be regarded as a real and substantial good, be it ever so disagreeable in itself; and, on the contrary, whatever puts us in danger of losing our souls, ought to be regarded as an evil, though it be ever so pleasing to our inclinations. These two principles alone, if deeply imprinted in our hearts, would rectify all our ideas of what we usually call temporal *goods* and *evils*, and place every thing in its true light. For if we took our estimate of things from those two principles, *wealth* and *poverty*, *honours* and *disgrace*, *afflictions* and *prosperity*, would be considered no otherwise, than precisely as they may have an influence upon the happiness or unhappiness of our future state.

This leads me to a *third reflection* upon the merciful dispensation of Providence, to those whom God visits with afflictions in this life. For whatever is a means to rescue us from eternal evils, ought certainly to be regarded as a mercy. Now nothing of its own nature conduces more effectually to this end, than sufferings of what kind soever they be, or by

what hand soever they are presented; and we are sure to profit by them, unless by our ill conduct we wilfully frustrate the designs of the Creator. The reason hereof, according to St. Austin, is, because it is an unalterable law, that sin must be punished either now or hereafter. It follows, therefore, that the only way a sinner has to prevent the rigour of God's justice hereafter, is now to do justice upon himself, either by mortification of his own free choice, or by humbly submitting to the chastisements of his heavenly Father. For though these sufferings be not voluntary by way of choice, because it is not in our power to avoid them, yet if we submit heartily to them, we make them, as it were, become our own act and deed; and by so doing render them as acceptable to Almighty God, and satisfactory for our sins, as other works of penance, which we voluntarily impose upon ourselves.

But now, considering how backward men generally are in punishing themselves, when it is left to their own free wills, and how apt every one is to spare and favour himself, ought we not to acknowledge it as a very great mercy, when God is pleased to rescue us, as I may say, out of the hands of our own self-love and sloth, and put us under a happy necessity of suffering something for the present, rather than reserve us for those terrible punishments, which infinitely surpass, both in their grievousness and duration, all the sufferings we can imagine in this life?

For what comparison is there between *temporal* and *eternal!* Suppose, for instance, that a tedious and painful sickness is the cross God sends us, is not this much easier than to burn for ever in hell-fire? If poverty, with the inconveniences that attend it be our suffering, is not this condition far more tolerable than that of the damned, who are not only reduced to an utter privation of every thing they possessed in this world, but have lost Heaven itself, which we may still secure, if we please? If God be pleased to visit us with the loss of persons that are dearest to us, is this any thing to the dreadful pain of loss, which the damned suffer in Hell, and which we have so often merited by our sins?

Finally, suppose all the sufferings of this life were heaped upon one single man, whereof there is no example to be found, might we not yet look upon his state as infinitely happy, if compared with the miseries and torments of the damned? How great a goodness is it then in Almighty

God, to put it in our power to satisfy his infinite justice, on such easy terms as are the short sufferings of this life? What mercy is it to accept of a payment so infinitely disproportioned to the infinite debt we owe him, and be content with the satisfaction of a light and momentary pain, from those who have deserved the everlasting torments of hell-fire? Truly, whoever is not sensible of this mercy, has either lost his faith, and flatters himself that hell-fire is a mere fiction, or his reason, in not judging it better to suffer something for a time, than be infinitely miserable for eternity.

But to come now to a conclusion; it will not be amiss to take a serious view of the state of our souls, and consider impartially, what tendency the main body of our actions hath hitherto had, and if we should continue to live on, much after the same way, what would be the end of it, naturally speaking: Now, all know that nothing but mortal sin, unrepented of, can bring us to Hell. If, therefore, a man's conscience reproaches him with nothing that is notorious, though he cannot have an infallible security, he has, however, good grounds to hope well of himself; and the longer he has served God, without offending him mortally, the better ground he has for this hope.

But if, on the contrary, a person has gone on in a kind of regular course of sinning, he has but two things to do, in order to prevent his being condemned to everlasting flames: But these two things are absolutely necessary, viz. *First*, To leave off sinning once for all; and *2dly*, To do worthy fruits of penance for sins past. If the name of penance startles him, let him consider, that it is much easier doing penance here than burning in Hell. And since one of the two must be, his own reason will direct him to the choice he is to make: For we have it now in our power to choose, but we shall not have it hereafter. Oh, if we could but see those fiery dungeons kindled with unquenchable flames! If we could but hear the frightful lamentations, curses and execrations of the damned, how sweet and pleasing would the name of penance be! How should we bless God's infinite goodness for having spared us so long, and giving us still time and opportunity to expiate our sins, upon such easy terms as may be done in this life?

Let us not then demur any longer upon the choice we are to make: for all time spent in deliberating is but time

lost: Every moment of delay makes but our case grow worse, by rendering our return to God more difficult than it was before. For in the mean time our enemy gains ground upon us, our habits take deeper root, our wills grow stiffer, our hearts more corrupt, and, finally, our passions more stubborn and rebellious against the government of reason, and impressions of grace: All which are terrible symptoms of a soul advancing by large steps to her eternal ruin. O God, preserve us from this misfortune. Give us grace to repent in time, that we may not perish eternally.

SEVENTEENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

OF HEAVEN.

THE JOYS OF HEAVEN SURPASS ALL HUMAN UNDERSTANDING.

That eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him. 1 Cor. ii. 9.

HITHERTO I have only represented objects proper to affect us with terror, but the subject I am now entering upon will nourish our hope, and kindle in our hearts the most ardent desires. It is true, indeed, both *fear* and *hope* are necessary to preserve the balance of the soul, but they work upon her in a different manner. We are dragged to our duty by fear, but hope allures us to it with pleasure. The fear of punishment is often necessary to restrain the natural current of men's passions; but the hope of an eternal crown is the noblest incentive to virtue, and prevails most upon generous souls: It is our strength in temptations, our comfort in afflictions, and our refreshment amidst the toils and labours of this mortal life.

Let us then examine, what God has revealed concerning the eternal reward prepared for those who love him here on earth. I shall at present confine myself to some reflections upon the words of my text, which shall be the whole subject of this Entertainment.

What the word of God has revealed concerning the joys of Heaven, viz. *That eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him,* imports two truths: 1*st*, That the nature of the joys of Heaven is wholly unknown

to us; and 2*dly*, That they surpass all human understanding. Now, both these truths furnish matter for reflections proper to give us a great idea of them.

For in the first place, the nature and quality of the joys of Heaven being such as are unknown to us, make it evident, that they will be very different from what we experience in this life; and this is a good proof of their being true and solid pleasures: the reason is, because we certainly know, that those of this world are not so, since they, who have had the very choicest of them at command, and drunk the largest draughts of them, have after all been forced to own, that they are but *vanity and affliction of heart.* It would therefore be a very poor commendation of heavenly beatitude, to tell us it would be of the same kind with what many have experienced here below. But when on the contrary, we are certainly informed, that it will be something as yet unknown, and never tasted by any mortal man; that the figure of this world will pass, and a new scene appear, which no mortal eye has ever seen; this cannot but give us a very advantageous idea of that blessed state; because we are at least assured by it, that none of those pleasures, which we already know by unquestionable experience to be adulterated and false, will be admitted into Heaven.—Whence we may confidently conclude, that all its joys will be solid and substantial; that is, such as will fully answer all the ends and purposes of the most perfect and complete beatitude.

I add, moreover, that the joys of Heaven being wholly different from those we experience in this life, give us to understand, that even after the re-union of the body, they will not be borrowed from gross and earthly objects, nor by consequence conveyed to us by the ministry of material sensitive organs; for then they would be like the pleasures of this world, and *the eye might see them, the ear hear them, and the heart of man might conceive them;* but they will be of a pure, refined, spiritual nature, such as are proper for a spiritual substance, and a soul delivered from the clog of corruptible flesh and blood.

However, St. Paul has given us to understand, that the *body* will also have its peculiar reward. Yet the nature of this reward, even as described by St. Paul, will be such, that we can but have a very imperfect and obscure idea of it in this life. His words are these: *It is sown in corruption, it*

shall rise in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it shall rise in glory: it is sown in weakness, it shall rise in power: it is sown a natural body, it shall rise a spiritual body. 1 Cor. xv. 42, 43, 44.

Here we have the body described by St. Paul, both as it is now, and will be hereafter. *It is sown* (says he) *in corruption;* because it has the seeds of *corruption* and *mortality* interwoven in its very frame and constitution. It is no sooner brought into the world, but it becomes the subject of diseases, and stands in need of being daily repaired with food and sleep, and frequently patched up with remedies. Yet all this hinders not this crazy house of clay from mouldering away by insensible degrees, and falling to the ground in a small term of years.

It is also *sown in dishonour;* for of itself it is no better than a dead unactive lump, and wholly unfit for any functions of life, as appears plainly from the moment that the soul is separated from it. *It is sown in weakness;* as being subject to numberless infirmities, which keep it in a continual ebbing and flowing, and such a constant circulation of changes, that its state is scarce ever fixed for the space of one day. Finally, it is *sown a natural body;* that is, made of the same earth as other bodies, and is therefore a hindrance rather than a help to the free exercise of our intellectual powers.

This is St. Paul's description of the body in its corruptible and mortal state, and we all find the truth of it by daily experience. But its condition will be most wonderfully improved at the general resurrection; for then, according to the Apostle's doctrine, it will be raised in incorruption, in glory, in power, and with all the qualities and advantages of a spiritual body. Which doubtless gives us a general idea of something very perfect, beautiful and noble. But when we come to examine our ideas, we find them almost wholly made up of negatives; for no man can form a distinct and positive idea of an incorruptible, a glorified, a spiritual body, any more than he can conceive the nature of a thought, or the substance of a man's soul; because we have no notion but of corporeal extension and matter. So that we rather conceive what the body will not be, than what it really will be, at its second meeting with the soul.

We know, for example, that the seeds of diseases and mortality will be no longer a part or ingredient of its con-

stitution; that it will be no longer molested with jarring qualities, which are the inward causes of its decay, nor subject to alterations produced by outward causes; that, finally, it will be divested of all its former weaknesses, and so fitted by the omnipotent hand of God, that it will be no more a clog upon the intellectual faculties, but made to answer the very quickest motions of the soul.

All this, I say, we know, being assured of it by the revealed word of God. But all this knowledge amounts to no more than separating from the body the defects and infirmities that attend it in this mortal life. But as to any clear or positive notion, how a true and real body can be *spiritual*, *impassable*, and *immortal*, or how it will be organized after the resurrection, or in what manner the soul will be affected by it, or act in conjunction with it, these are mysteries, concerning which we are yet wholly in the dark; and an humble faith must supply the defect of our ideas, till God be mercifully pleased to favour us with an experimental knowledge of the happiness of our future state.

But if the proper nature, even of the reward prepared for the *body*, be unknown to us, the joys and pleasures laid up for man's better part, the *soul*, are yet farther removed from our knowledge in this world. We are sure it is by reason of their greatness, excellency, and sublimeness, that they cannot *enter into the heart of man;* and that they surpass all earthly delights, as much as the future state of the soul will surpass that of her present confinement to an earthly and corruptible body. For since it is beyond all question, that God has fitted his rewards to the nature and condition of those that are to enjoy them, there is no room to doubt but that the delights he has prepared for the soul, in her perfect state, will be the purest and noblest of all pleasures; that is, such as an immortal soul, wholly separated from all *earthly allay*, or reunited to a *glorified body*, can relish, and be consummately happy in.

But if any one objects, that a bare prospect of things unknown and unexperienced, affords but little encouragement to part with the present enjoyments of life, nature being unwilling to renounce what is found experimentally pleasing, in hopes of things we know nothing of, nor how they will affect us hereafter; I answer, that though we have no clear or distinct knowledge of heavenly beatitude, we know in general that it is something very great, something highly

excellent and delightful; for the word of God has taken care to represent it to us under the noblest figures; as of an *eternal feast*, an *everlasting kingdom*, a *never-fading crown of glory*, and so forth. Now, suppose it were any man's case to be invited to take possession of some foreign kingdom, and that he were at the same time informed, by persons of undoubted truth, that this kingdom abounded with all things requisite to make him a glorious and happy prince, would he be so foolish as to despise it, because he had not travelled into it, nor ever seen any part of it, nor had any particular knowledge of the proper nature or qualities of the things that were to make him happy? Surely no rational man would ever act so foolish a part.

And is not this a faithful representation of our case in reference to the *kingdom of Heaven?* We are all invited to it; we are certainly informed, that it is a most glorious kingdom; nay, a kingdom abounding with every thing a rational soul can wish to make him perfectly happy. It is true, we know not distinctly what those things are; we have never travelled into those upper regions of eternal bliss, where God displays his glory to the blessed spirits which encompass the throne; nor have our eyes or ears been ever entertained with the glorious wonders of that place. But we are undoubtedly assured, that our very highest expectations will not only be fully satisfied, but infinitely surpassed. We are assured that when we have put off these bodies, we shall then have a clear view of those surprising glories which are now hidden from us; which surely ought to be sufficient both to inflame our hearts with the most ardent desires of them, and spur us on to the practice of all virtues, necessary to render us worthy to be admitted to them.

This will appear more evident from the second truth contained in the words of my text, viz. *that the joys of Heaven surpass all human understanding.* For it follows plainly from this truth, that whatever state of happiness the wit of man can invent or imagine, though far beyond any thing that has, or ever will be attained to in this life, it comes infinitely short of the real blessings God has prepared for us.

Now to apprehend, as we ought, the improvement that may be made of this reflection, I will endeavour to set forth the most complete and perfect state of imaginary felicity a man can frame to himself; and by considering first, what great and good things we are able to conceive;

and then reflecting how little all this must, notwithstanding, be comparatively to a state of happiness, which, for its excellency and greatness surpasses our conceptions, we shall thence be able to make the truest judgment of the blessed state prepared for us in Heaven.

First, then, let us suppose Almighty God would create a new world or terrestrial paradise, blessed every where with a sweet and temperate air, enjoying a perpetual day, beautified with all variety of pleasing objects to delight the senses; and, in a word, abounding with every thing, not only to supply all the necessities and conveniencies of life, but even to entertain it with a continual succession and agreeable variety of pleasures.

Next, let us suppose all pains and evils banished from this place, as *hunger* and *thirst*, *heat* and *cold*, *wars* and *enmities*, *cares* and *troubles*, *diseases* and *old age*, *sin* and *death*; and, in a word, whatever in our present state contributes to make life uneasy and uncomfortable to us.—Lastly, let us imagine some one chosen creature, endowed with all the rare perfections both of mind and body to fit him for the sovereign empire of this new world, and all other creatures paying an entire subjection to him, and striving to contribute, with the utmost of their power, to complete his happiness.

Now we must own the state here set forth to be such as, humanly speaking, has nothing wanting to satisfy the highest ambition and largest desires of man's heart. For it both comprehends, in a very eminent degree, every thing we usually esteem and admire, and excludes whatever man's nature fears or hates. In effect, who of us all would not think himself happy, as a rational creature could wish or desire to be, if it were his lot to be raised to the condition I have described? It is evident, that the highest felicity, and most envied state of this world, is but misery and servitude, if put in balance with it. Yet nothing is more certain, than that the real beatitude of the other world is infinitely beyond this imaginary one, how pleasing and delightful soever it appears to human sense.

Good God! is not Heaven then yet infinitely more delightful than what exceeds, by so many degrees, all the delights this world can afford? Is the felicity thou hast prepared for thy faithful servants, not only infinitely greater than all the real blessings that have ever been enjoyed in this life,

but even surpassing all imaginary ones we can frame to ourselves? Is it not happiness enough to be delivered from all that is painful to nature, and to be made sovereign lord and monarch of a kingdom, abounding with every thing that is pleasing and delightful to us? Has thy bounty still greater blessings in store for such poor wretches as we are? Yes, christians, for all that I have mentioned is within the bounds of what is *comprehensible*, and *can enter into the heart of man.* But the joys of Heaven are too great to be conceived; neither *that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him.* And, therefore, as there is no proportion between what is comprehensible, and what surpasses all human comprehension; it follows, that the heavenly beatitude is incomparably greater than what I have described; as being a state, the joys whereof neither words can express, nor thoughts can reach.

It is true, the word of God gives us an account of the *celestial Jerusalem*, much resembling the imaginary world I have described. For it tells us that it is a city, whose walls are raised with *precious stones*, and every gate is made of *a rich pearl;* that its mansions are built with *choicest jewels;* and the pavement of its streets are all *transparent gold;* that in the midst there runs a crystal river, perpetually flowing from the throne of God, upon whose banks are planted *trees of life*, making immortal all that but taste their fruits; that this blessed city enjoys an *everlasting day;* because *its sun is the Lamb, and the light that shines, the glory of God;* that hunger and thirst are banished from it; that the inhabitants of this thrice happy city are *crowned heads*, and in secure possession of an *everlasting reign;* that the glorified bodies shine brighter than the sun, and being clothed with incorruptibleness, enjoy an *ever-flourishing youth*, and are delivered from all those painful diseases, which insensibly destroy nature, and are the usual harbingers of death.

This is the description which the word of God gives of the *heavenly Jerusalem*, and its inhabitants. However, it is certain, that the greatest part of it is made up of figurative expressions, accommodated to our earthly taste, and representing the happy state of souls in glory, by types and figures of things best known and most valued in this world. For if gold and precious stones, rich buildings, and other such

like sensible and material objects, were the things that are to make us happy hereafter, the joys of Heaven might easily be conceived, and every one would be capable of forming a clear idea of them. And therefore, since we are assured that they surpass all human conception, and have never entered into the heart of man, the consequence is, that all material objects, though ever so noble and refined, are but faint shadows of the blessings that constitute the essential beatitude of the life to come.

After these reflections, it will not be surprising, that the saints had no other concern in this life than how to secure Heaven to themselves; that they had it always in their view, bore it continually in their hearts, made it the object of all their affections, the centre of all their desires, and the end of all their actions. For they were directed by the light of faith, and their faith taught them, that God had created them for eternal and incomprehensible joys, to which the enjoyments of this life bore no proportion. This was inducement enough to make them despise the one, and continually thirst after the other. This gave them a disgust of all earthly pleasures, and made the riches and honours of this world appear as contemptible to their thoughts, as they are in themselves. This, finally, made them set so high a value upon Heaven, as to purchase it, even with the most painful sufferings. And this ought likewise to have at least so far an influence upon us, as both to render us faithful in the discharge of all the duties of a Christian life, and make us submit cheerfully to all the crosses and afflictions Almighty God is pleased to send us.

EIGHTEENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

OF THE BEATIFIC VISION.

We see now through a glass in a dark manner, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know even as I am known. 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

To see God *face to face*, and know him *as he is himself*, is that perfect and consummate happiness of man's soul, of which I am now going to speak: and am very sensible of the difficulty of the task I have undertaken. For we are so unacquainted with what passes in the other world, that to treat of this subject is like walking in a dark and unknown

path, where we may very easily either stumble upon some error, or mistake groundless fancies for solid truths. I shall therefore, endeavour to proceed with so much caution, as not to advance one single step, without taking either the holy scriptures, or at least some of the fathers or approved divines, for my guide. I have already said something concerning the glory of the body, and shall at present only speak of that part of heavenly beatitude which regards the soul, and which St. Austin has epitomized in these three words; *videbimus, amabimus, laudabimus;* we shall *see*, we shall *love*, we shall *praise*. The first word expresses the whole substance of the *beatific vision*, as divines call it, that is, the sight of God, which makes the soul happy. The two other words express the immediate and inseparable effects of it; the *love*, *joy*, and *delight* which result from this blessed vision in the soul; of which I shall treat in my next discourse, intending to make the *beatific vision* alone the subject of this Entertainment.

It is certain, that man's soul being a spiritual substance, cannot be happy but in the possession of some spiritual good, nor perfectly happy but in the possession of the most perfect spiritual good: and therefore, when the scripture seems to promise certain sensible and material goods, as *crowns*, and *kingdoms*, *youth*, without decay; *wealth*, *power*, and *magnificent palaces;* when it tells us, that the saints shall *eat* and *drink* in the kingdom of God; finally, when it sets forth the *celestial Jerusalem*, as a city abounding in all such things as are most valued in this world, as built with *precious stones*, paved with the *purest gold*, beautified with *stately towers*, and so forth, we must, as I have already observed, take care not to imagine, as if the enjoyment of things of this nature were to be the essential reward of the life to come. For this would be to set up a kind of *Mahometan* beatitude, instead of the *Christian* one, and translate the world itself into Heaven: and what can be the consequence hereof, but our making the world, instead of Almighty God, our last end, and the principal object of our love, hope, and desire? St. Austin himself, in his comment upon the 86th psalm, has taken care to precaution us against this error. *Let us beware* (says he) *not to propose to ourselves any pleasures like those we relish here on earth: for otherwise all our temperance, which makes us now abstain from worldly pleasures, will be the fruit of self-love. There are those*

that fast only to eat afterwards with a better relish: If therefore you believe that the pleasures of Heaven will be like those of this world, and you refrain from them now, upon no other motive than to enjoy them more fully hereafter, you imitate those who fast only to prepare themselves for a feast, and in the very practice of temperance are guilty of greater intemperance.

Thus St. Austin, who is very large upon this subject, to prevent our falling into an error which would utterly destroy the love of God, and set up self-love in its place. It is therefore an undoubted truth, that the essential felicity of the soul, consists not in the enjoyment of any of those sensible objects or pleasures, to which self-love inclines us in this life; and that whatever expressions in scripture seem to favour this sort of beatitude, are not to be understood literally, but in a figurative or spiritual sense, as will appear beyond all question, from other passages of holy writ, which I shall have occasion to quote hereafter.

First, then, the scripture tells us, that the blessed souls in Heaven shall *see God face to face*, that they shall see him *clearly*, and as he is in himself: for the better understanding whereof we must observe, that *to see* and *know God*, are synonimous terms, and signify the self-same thing. For Almighty God being a *pure spirit*, cannot be seen with corporeal eyes; and the soul being also a *spiritual substance*, has, properly speaking, no eyes but what are spiritual. Now, the eye of the soul is her *understanding:* whatever, therefore, the soul *knows*, she is properly said to *see*, and to *see clearly* what she *knows clearly*.

This being supposed, the scripture, I say, tells us, that the saints in Heaven shall not only *see God*, but see him *clearly*. This is St. Paul's doctrine, in the words of my text. *We see now as through a glass in a dark manner, but then face to face: Now I know in part, but then I shall know even as I am known.* It is true, indeed, we know God in this life, but we know him only by faith; and though faith be certain, it is however obscure, it shews him not as he is in himself: we only see him at a distance, and, as it were, through a dark mist or cloud. But hereafter this cloud will be removed from before the eyes of the soul. *Faith* will then cease, and the *sight of glory* succeed in its place. And then will the infinite beauty, and incomprehensible majesty of God appear in its full lustre. God will then no longer

hide his face from us. No cloud or darkness will then interpose, to rob us of any part of this blessed object. But we shall see him clearly; we shall see him intimately united to us; we shall see him as he is himself.

Oh, what a blessed sight will this be! How glorious! how delightful! How worthy of a Christian soul to covet and thirst after! For by thus seeing God clearly, and as he is himself, we shall be perfectly acquainted with all those dark and sublime mysteries, which now surpass all human understanding: as the distinction of three persons in one indivisible nature; the eternal procession of the *Son* from the *Father*, and of the *Holy Ghost* from the *Father* and *Son*, and the ineffable union of the *divine* and *human nature*, subsisting in one *increated person*.

2dly, We shall see all the infinite *attributes*, that is, perfections of God. We shall see that boundless wisdom, which reaches strongly from end to end, and disposes all things sweetly: that unlimited power, which, with a single word, produced heaven and earth out of nothing. That fathomless depth, and inexhaustible fund of goodness, which incessantly communicates itself to all created beings: and that infinite mercy which prompted him to give his only Son to redeem mankind.

Finally, in seeing God clearly, we shall discover all the hidden ways of his *providence* in the government of this world. As why innocence is often permitted to be oppressed, and wickedness to prosper: Why our prayers are sometimes heard, and at other times rejected: Why miseries and poverty were the lot of some, and prosperity and wealth the undeserved blessing of others. He that was persecuted, hated and contemned, will then clearly see why God allotted him that portion. He that was sick and poor, deprived of all conveniencies of life, and forced to earn his bread with the daily sweat of his brows, whilst others enjoyed their ease, and wallowed in pleasures, will then be thoroughly convinced of the infinite wisdom and justice of this seeming partiality, and confess that God was more favourable to him, than he would have been to himself, had he been permitted to make his own desires the rule of his choice.

All this I say, and infinitely more than I am able to express, will the saints see in seeing God; and that not confusedly, but clearly and distinctly; not successively or by parts, but altogether, and at one single, unchangeable, and

eternal view. *Non erunt ibi* (says St. Austin) *volubiles cogitationes nostræ ab aliis ad alias euntes atque redeuntes.* There, viz. in Heaven, our thoughts shall not be roving, or passing to and fro, from object to object; but from the very moment the soul is admitted to the beatific vision, the unsettledness and wandering of her thoughts, which imperfection attends her in this life, will forthwith cease, and her whole attention be eternally and immoveably fixed upon one single object, which is God himself, in whom she will see all things necessary to render her completely happy.

It remains now only to shew, that this clear sight, or knowledge of God is, that which makes the soul happy. St. Austin gives this reason for it; because to see or know God clearly, is to *possess* him: *eum nosse habere est.* And since a soul that is in possession of an infinite good, cannot but be completely happy, it follows that the soul's beatitude consists in this clear knowledge of God. This reason of St. Austin is grounded upon our Saviour's own words, John 17th, where he addressed himself thus to his eternal Father: *This is life everlasting to know the only true God.* To know him by the dim light of *faith*, is but a necessary disposition to eternal life; but to know him by the clear *light of glory*, is that which puts the soul in a secure and everlasting possession of him.

However, since to our imagination there appears a large difference between *seeing* and *possessing* a thing, St. Austin, to correct this error of imagination, endeavours to prove it by this argument, that in relation to God they are the same. Because God being the most excellent and transcendent good, cannot be possessed but by that part of man which is most excellent in him, viz. his soul. And since the *understanding* is the noblest faculty, and *knowledge* the noblest operation of the soul, he concludes, that whatever is possessed by the soul, is possessed by knowing, *quicquid autem mente habetur, noscendo habetur;* and thence he infers, that to know God clearly, is to possess him.

This is St. Austin's argument, which sets this matter in as easy a light as its obscurity will permit. In effect, all intellectual beings, from the highest to the lowest, have no other way of *possessing* than by *knowing* God himself, who is the supreme intellectual being, has from all eternity possessed himself, and been infinitely happy by *comprehensively* knowing his own infinite essence. The *angels* are

also perfectly happy by possessing God; and possess him no otherwise than by seeing him clearly. Hence our Saviour, to describe their happiness, expresses it in these words: *the angels in Heaven always see the face of the Father who is in Heaven.* Now then, to come down to the lowest intellectual being, which is man's soul, since our Saviour assures us, that in the life to come *we shall be like the angels of God*, it follows that our happiness will be the same in substance as theirs; and that as they see God *face to face*, and in thus seeing him possess him, and in possessing him are perfectly happy, so shall we also possess God by seeing him, and by possessing him be partakers with them in eternal bliss.

Hence it is that holy Job, in the extremity of his afflictions, had recourse to no other comfort than the hopes he had of being one day admitted to this blessed vision. *I believe*, (says he) *that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth, and be compassed again with my skin, and in my flesh shall see God, whom I myself shall see, and mine eyes shall behold, and no other: This hope is laid in my bosom.* This also made the royal Prophet, who had a lively faith of the future state of souls, express such ardent longings to see God. *As the hart*, (says he,) *pants after the water-brooks, so pants my soul after thee, O God; my soul thirsts for God, for the living God. O, when shall I come and appear before thy face!* But why did this holy prophet thus earnestly desire to see the face of God? He gives this reason for it in another psalm; *I shall be satiated, when thy glory shall appear.* For he knew this blessed sight would put him in secure possession of an infinite good, and leave no desire of his soul unsatisfied.

But if you ask how is it possible, that since there is an infinite disproportion between the infinite majesty of God, and the littleness inseparable from the condition of a created being; since the scripture tells us, that God *dwells in inaccessible light;* finally, since God himself declared to his great servant Moses, desiring to see his face, *that no man can see his face and live;* if you ask how is it possible that any creature should be able to bear the clear sight of God, and intimate presence of so great a majesty? I answer, that no soul would be able to bear the clear sight of God, were she not first prepared and fitted for it by a certain su-

pernatural quality, which schoolmen call the *light of glory*. I will not pretend to explain to you the nature of this quality, but hope we shall one day experience the happy effects of it, and we shall then know what it is, to our everlasting joy and comfort. However, divines agree, that it is the most sublime and perfect participation of the divine nature a pure creature is capable of: So that as the very lowest degree of *sanctifying grace*, surpasses in its intrinsic value anything, though ever so perfect within the sphere of *nature*, so in like manner this *light of glory* transcends in excellency whatever is most sublime within the order of *grace*. St. Denis defines it *influxus substantificus divinitatis*, a substantial influence of the divinity. Which expression seems to import, as if Almighty God darted, as it were, some rays of his own infinite light into the souls of the blessed, to enable them to bear his divine presence.

Hence divines attribute principally two effects to this *light of glory*. The first is, to fortify and strengthen the soul in such a manner as to enable her to subsist in the presence of God, and not be dazzled with the *splendour of his glory*. It is of this light, according to St. Austin's explication, the royal prophet speaks in his 35th psalm, where he addresses himself thus to God, *in lumine tuo videbimus lumen:* in thy light we shall see light. For here the prophet distinguishes between two lights, viz. that *which we shall see*, and that *by which we shall see it*. The first is God himself, and it is what we ask, when we pray for the departed souls, that *eternal light may shine unto them:* But that, whereby we shall see it, is the *light of glory* I now speak of. So that the prophet's meaning is, that by virtue of the *light of glory*, which will be infused into us, we shall see God, who is himself *eternal light*.

But no one speaks more clearly of this blessed light, than the prophet Isaiah, ch. lx. where his prophetic spirit suddenly carried him from the contemplation of the future increase and prosperity of the church militant, to that of the glory of the church triumphant; he discourses thus upon it: *The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither shall the brightness of the moon enlighten thee: But the Lord shall be unto thee for an everlasting light, and thy God for thy glory. Thy sun shall go down no more, and thy moon shall not decrease, for the Lord shall be unto thee for an everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.*

Thus speaks this holy prophet, declaring thereby, that God will not only be clearly seen by the saints, but that himself will be the light, whereby they shall see him.

The second effect, which divines attribute to the *light of glory*, is its raising the soul in such an eminent degree above herself, as to render her, as it were, all *Godlike* and *divine*. Now in this, they ground themselves upon this celebrated sentence of St. John, *We know*, (says he,) *that when God shall appear, we shall be like unto him, because we shall see him as he is*. By which the apostle means not barely a likeness of *conformity;* for that may be attained to by the help of grace, even in this life; but, doubtless, some *closer union* and nearer relation to God: but whatever it be (for no words can express it) we may boldly conceive something extraordinary, and surpassing by many degrees the most elevated *exstasies* and *unions*, the greatest saints have experienced in this life, since these were only some kind of antipasts of future glory.

And therefore spiritual writers, to give us the highest ideas possible of it, endeavour to explain it by the similitude of a red-hot iron, which has the fire so incorporated with it, that it seems to be no more iron, but transubstantiated into fire; or of a drop of water, which being poured into any quantity of wine, loses all its taste and colour, seems to change its nature, and be turned into wine. For so the blessed souls in Heaven, by virtue of that intimate participation of Almighty God, are so closely united to him, that they seem wholly lost in that ocean of bliss, and become, as it were, one and the same thing with him. *For when God shall appear, we shall be like unto him, because we shall see him as he is.*

O what a blessed change will this be! How different from that unhappy one, which attends the soul at her entrance into her clayey mansion of a mortal and corruptible body! For though she be spiritual by nature, and formed immediately by the pure hand of God, yet by being immersed in flesh and blood, she takes strangely after the nature of her earthly companion, and in some measure degenerates into earth. *But when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall be clothed with immortality*, then will she become the subject of a quite different transformation. Her heavenly spouse, by uniting her closely to himself, will then not only take away from her

all remains of earthly allay, but enrich her with so large a portion of his own perfections, as to render her the perfect image of himself. *For when God shall appear, we shall be like unto him, because we shall see him as he is.*

But, to conclude—we must observe what follows immediately in St. John, *Every man*, (says he) *that has this hope, purifies himself, even as he is pure.* No doubt but we all hope to be one day partakers of this happy transformation, by seeing God *face to face.* But we must consider whether this hope be well grounded; and St. John has given us here a mark to judge by, whether it be or no. *Every man that has this hope, purifies himself, even as he is pure.* For it follows hence, that they who make it not their business to purify themselves in this life, hope in vain to see God in the life to come: For which reason also Christ has promised the clear sight of God, as a peculiar reward to the clean of heart: *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.* Now cleanness of heart, considering how prone man's nature is to sin, can only be acquired by our daily endeavouring to wash off the stains we have already contracted, and adorn our souls with the virtues which will either be rewarded or perfected in heaven: For though we seldom attain the ultimate perfection of any virtue in this life, yet to be rightly qualified for Heaven, we must possess them all in some degree. There are certain dispositions, indispensibly requisite to fit us for the state of bliss, and whoever goes out of the world without them goes unprepared.

If therefore we aspire to eternal happiness, we must make it our business to secure the necessary disposition for it: If we desire to possess God *in glory*, we must first take care to preserve him in our souls *by grace:* Finally, if we hope to be hereafter *like unto God*, we must study to become in some measure conformable to him in this life, by cleansing our souls, as far as this mortal state will permit, from all sinful defilements, and imitating his infinite holiness, by the constant practice of an innocent and holy life. *For every man that has this hope, purifies himself, even as he is pure.* And by thus purifying himself becomes worthy to be admitted to his blessed sight, where he will *love* and praise him, and *rejoice* in him for ever, as I shall shew at large in my next discourse.

NINETEENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

OF THE LOVE, JOY, AND PRAISES, RESULTING FROM THE BEATIFIC VISION.

Lord, it is good for us to be here. Matt. xvii. 4.

Thus spoke St. Peter, transported with excessive joy and pleasure, to see his dear Lord and master all-glorious; though himself had no share in this transformation, but was a bare witness or spectator of it. And how then will a soul be filled with delight when she finds herself, all on a sudden, translated from the miseries of this life, to a state of immortality and inconceivable joys! with what feeling sense of her happiness will she then say, *Lord, it is good for us to be here!* And how will her joy be increased, when she is undoubtedly assured of the unchangeableness of her state, and that her eternal abode is to be with Christ in glory? When she will not only see Christ's sacred humanity outshining the brightness of the sun, but all the infinite beauties and perfections of the divine nature; the clear sight whereof, is that which constitutes her *essential* happiness, as I have shewn at large in my last discourse; and I will now proceed to explain its immediate and inseparable effects: I mean, the *love*, *joy* and *delight* resulting from this blessed vision in the soul, which shall be the whole subject of this Entertainment.

It is impossible to see God clearly, and not love him. Because infinite *beauty*, infinite *majesty*, infinite *goodness*, and *perfection*, clearly seen, are objects that command love with an irresistible force. And therefore divines say, that though the saints in Heaven love God with the whole propensity of their souls, and desire nothing more than to love him, and see him eternally beloved by all his creatures; yet, to speak properly, they do not love him *freely*; because seeing nothing in him but what is infinitely good and worthy of love, they have it not in their power not to love him, but are under a happy necessity of loving him, with the whole capacity of their souls.

However, to give you the clearest idea I can of the greatness of their love, the proper seat whereof is that part of the soul which is called the *will*, it is requisite to consider the unhappy condition of man's will in this life, com-

paratively to her happy state in the life to come. Now man's will is commonly called by divines a *blind power*, because she has no light of her own ; but all the light she has is communicated to her by the understanding, which also is oftener a false light than a true one : If she *fears*, *hates*, or *flies* anything, it is because the understanding represents it as an *evil*, whether it be real or imaginary. In like manner, if the understanding represents the possession of any thing as a considerable *good*, or at least as preferable to the privation of it, the *will* conceives immediately a love for it, moves towards it with eager desires, if it be absent, and is agreeably affected with it, if it be present.

But this pleasure seldom lasts long in this life, but after a short enjoyment is either utterly destroyed, or very much abated by some considerable defect appearing in the object, which insensibly weans the will from her first affection to it, and often changes it into aversion.

Now this inconstancy and changeableness of the will in this life, is chiefly owing to the *mixed nature* of all earthly goods and evils. For as there is scarce any thing so bad, but has some good interwoven in it nature, or resulting from it, so there is nothing so good and perfect, but upon a strict and impartial examination, some blemish or imperfection may be discovered in it : And this is the reason why neither our inclinations nor aversions are ever in a fixed state in this life, but are always either ebbing or flowing, according as *good* or *evil* appears to preponderate in their respective objects. Thus the same things or persons, differently represented, may appear very agreeable at one time, and very disagreeable at another : We may pursue a thing with an eager desire to-day, grow indifferent to it to-morrow, and perhaps hate it the next day after, because what we loved at first, being afterwards regarded in a different light, we may discover defects and imperfections in it, which were before concealed from us.

Neither is this changeableness of the will, only in relation to the things of this world, which have all their allay mixed with their very natural frame and texture, but likewise in relation to the most important spiritual concerns, and such things as our faith assures us to be *unmixed goods* and *evils ;* as the possession of *sanctifying grace* on the one hand, and the loss of it on the other. For no man doubts but that *sanctifying grace* is an *unmixed good*, and

the loss of it an *unmixed evil* in its nature. Besides, our understanding, directed by faith, is convinced that God is an *infinite good*, and that the practice of virtue alone can secure this infinite good to us, and sin alone can deprive us of it; and how comes it then that the *will*, being directed, as I have said in all her motions by the *understanding*, is not in a continual eager pursuit after the possession of this good? Or that she flies not with the utmost abhorrence every thing that may rob us of it?

The first reason hereof is, because, however advantageous our ideas are of Almighty God, and though we know them to be unquestionably true, yet they are so imperfect and obscure, that they make but a very weak impression upon the heart, which is much more powerfully wrought upon by the clear ideas of *sensible goods*, conveyed to her in a feeling and palpable manner by the ministry of the senses, than by mere *spiritual objects*, proposed by the dim light of faith, and which cannot be seen, nor felt, nor clearly understood.

The second reason is, the almost continual dissipation of the mind, diverted from the thoughts of God, partly by the cares, and partly by the amusements of this life. So that the ideas we have of God either lying dormant by an inapplication, or being stifled in a throng of worldly thoughts, the heart or will is very little affected with the passing glances we sometimes cast towards him.

But the third and principal reason is, because the understanding itself acts many times a treacherous part, confederate with the enemies of our salvation, and instead of guiding the will by the light of *faith*, seduces her by the suggestions of flesh and blood. So that, although it represents Almighty God as an *infinite good*, it discourages the will from pursuing the acquisition of it, by representing it as a task incumbered with difficulties almost insuperable to human nature. It paints upon the imagination all the restraints and self-denials of a virtuous life in such frightful colours, and sets forth the charms of liberty and pleasures in such an agreeable light, that the will, prevailed upon by these deceitful appearances, is easily determined to consent to sin, for the sake of the pleasure annexed to it, and to reject God's grace, by reason of the combats and difficulties that attend the preservation of it. Because, *pleasures* are considered as a *good*, and *self-denials*, as an *evil* to nature.

This is the unfortunate condition of the *will* in this mortal state; ever various and inconsistent in her desires, pursuing with eagerness imaginary goods, and flying from imaginary evils. But *when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall be clothed with immortality:* When *faith* shall cease, and the *right of glory* succeed in its place, then will she be entirely delivered from this servile subjection to the caprice of a deluded imagination, and the misrepresentations of a deceitful understanding. Then will she be no more in danger of relapsing into her natural inconstancy: Because, the object of her love will always *be* and always *appear* the same; that is, infinitely *beautiful*, and infinitely *good*. And the *light of glory* shewing this blessed object eternally present, and shewing it clearly, and as it is in itself, her love will not only be without check, but so immoveably fixed, as to be beyond all possibility of abatement, interruption, or change.

But now, to bring these reflections upon the two different states of the soul into some order and method, the first material difference between the condition of a soul in bliss and her state in this mortal life is, that the ideas we have of God in this life are extremely weak and obscure. We know indeed that there is a God, and that he is a being infinitely perfect. Thus far our faith directs us. But we have no distinct ideas either of his essence, or of any one of his infinite perfections: Because we have no light whereby to see or know them. And therefore as our knowledge of him is weak and obscure, so is our love of him languid and inactive. But in Heaven, where the blessed behold God *face to face*, where they see all his perfections clearly and distinctly, and as they are in themselves, their wills being under no impediment, either from any defect of knowledge, or mixture of imperfections in the object, they love him from the very first moment with the whole capacity, strength and power of their souls.

2dly. In this life we are continually conversant with sensible objects, and the heart is most lamentably divided between God and his creatures. Husband and wife, children, friends, and relations, external goods and temporal concerns are but too apt to challenge a large share in our affections; and we all find, by sad experience, what powerful attractives these sensible objects are, and how forcibly they draw us towards the earth, so that the love even of the just in

this life is commonly so imperfect, that though God reigns *sovereignly*, he reigns not *absolutely*, in their hearts: I mean, though his love be *predominant*, it is not without check or allay, but has many inferior partners with it.

But in Heaven, where the saints are wholly absorbed in God; where, to speak properly, they see nothing but God, because they see him in every thing, and every thing in him; where, finally, all their thoughts center in God, and are incessantly employed in the contemplation of this glorious object; they also love God with a simple, pure, and undivided love. Their hearts are a throne whereon God reigns as absolute monarch, and part of their souls is so filled with him, that there is no room for any thing else; or if they love his creatures, it is purely in him, and for his sake. So that all the love they have either for themselves, or others, is ultimately terminated in God. And in a word, God is all in all things to them.

3dly. As our attention in this world is often diverted from God by the cares and amusements of human life, so is the love even of the just but too frequently interrupted.—It is uniform, unfixed, inconstant, and like an intermitting fever divided between cold and hot fits. But in Heaven, where the saints have the eyes of their souls immoveably turned towards their beloved object, and nothing interposes to take God out of their sight, their love is uniform, constant, and uninterrupted. It is one eternal act, or rather one external exstasy and rapture. It is a fire (as St. Austin calls it) that always burns, because the fuel that nourishes it is never consumed.

But the most material difference, and ground of all the rest is, that although man's soul be created to enjoy God eternally, and has by consequence an inclination in her nature to be united to him, yet in this world this inclination is so smothered under the weight of flesh and blood, or weakened by the continual opposition of the contrary inclinations of the body, that it is scarce able to exert itself, seems many times wholly extinct, and even when it is most active, carries her very slowly and feebly towards her last end.

But when she is now wholly disengaged from this clog or incumbrance, when this heavy load of flesh and blood, which bore her down to the earth, is now taken off, no tongue can express with what activity, or rather violence,

a soul, perfectly purified from sin, is carried towards God, the only object, source, and center of her happiness. We may justly compare it to the impetuous current of a rapid river, when the banks that kept it in are broken down; or to the violent motion of a stone, that is carried down with its whole weight to its center, when the obstacle that held it up is removed. For just so, when the soul is now delivered from the chains that held her captive, the inclinations she has in her nature to be united to God, will carry her to this beloved object, with an impetuosity not to be expressed in words.

And who then can conceive the exstasies of love and joy, when she now finds herself in full possession of the infinite good for which she was created; and to which her nature carries her with such ardent desires! Who can tell me with what delight she plunges herself into that ocean of bliss, with what avidity she drinks of that torrent of delights! With what ardent affections she enjoys the presence of her heavenly spouse! Methinks I hear her congratulate with herself, as she is represented in the Canticles of Solomon: *I have found whom my soul loveth, I have laid hold of him, and I will not let him go;* I have found him who is the only joy and delight of my heart; my spouse, my sovereign good, my God, and my all. I have found him, and nothing shall evermore separate me from him.

However, though it be impossible, either to express or conceive the excessive joy of a soul now in secure possession of eternal bliss, I cannot end my discourse without saying something of it. And all I can say is, that her joy will be proportioned to the infinite greatness of the good she possesses on the one hand, and the ardent love she has for it on the other. *Their joy,* (says St. Austin,) *will be according to the measure of their love: Their love will be according to the measure of their knowledge: And their joy in thee, O Lord, will be equal both to their knowledge and love of thee.* So that as the blessed souls will be wholly filled with God, so will they also be filled, or rather overwhelmed with excessive delight, joy and pleasure.

Hence the royal Prophet says, that the blessed in Heaven *shall be inebriated with the plenty of the House of God.* Which figurative expression represents most naturally the superabundance of their delight and joy: For as the virtue of wine by inebriation makes the heart light, and forget

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past sorrows; so will the large draught of heavenly delight cause a certain divine inebriation or drunkenness in the blessed souls, the happy effects whereof will be eternal transports of joy, and utter forgetfulness of past sufferings, conflicts, persecutions and afflictions: The delicious wine, presented to them by their heavenly bridegroom, will utterly drown all past sorrows, and their undoubted assurance of the perpetuity of their state, and their being now for ever delivered from them, will perfectly complete their joy. No more troubles, no more combats, no more persecutions; no more hunger or thirst, heat or cold, poverty or pain, sickness or death.

O blessed joys! O happy state! To be for ever delivered from the very fear of any evil, and enjoy whatever the heart can wish or desire! *To see* God clearly, *to love* him ardently, to *praise* him, and *rejoice* eternally in him! To possess what we shall never cease to love, and love what we shall never cease to possess! Oh! how truly may we say with the royal Prophet, *Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, O Lord, they shall praise thee for ever and ever.*— They shall praise thee for ever, because they shall never cease to love thee; and they shall never cease to love thee, because they shall never cease to behold thy blessed face.

But, O unhappy mortals, who are yet confined to this vale of tears! Unhappy mortals, who are banished from thy blessed sight, and condemned to see thee with fear and trembling, amidst a thousand dangers in the darksome labyrinth of this miserable world. However, permit us not at least, O God, to be so miserable as to fall in love with our misery; permit us not to grow fond of our exile, or sit down satisfied under our chains. But since it is by thy appointment we are banished for a time from thy presence, let us indeed submit to the sentence, but at the same time let us be heartily sensible, that our greatest misfortune in this life is to be separated from thee, since otherwise we are in danger of losing thee for ever. And therefore lest our present banishment should unhappily terminate in an everlasting separation hereafter, grant that though we live on earth, Heaven may be always the principal object of all our wishes, hopes and desires; and like true Israelites, we may despise the insipid pleasures of the sinful Babylon, this world: And when our inclinations invite, or even importune us to partake of the Babylonish

joys, grant that we may reject their solicitations with a christian disdain, and answer them as the Israelites did: *How shall we sing or rejoice in a strange land! If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand be forgot. Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if Jerusalem be not my chief joy.*

O heavenly Jerusalem, thou city of perfect joy and peace! Thou dwelling place of saints and angels! Thou palace of the King of Glory! Be thou the only object of our love, the only mark, at which all our hopes and wishes may be levelled, the only indivisible point where all our hearts desires may center. Let this world become despicable to us: Let us count all things in it as dung to purchase thee; that when the term of our exile is expired, we may be worthy to be received into thy sacred mansions, there to *see*, *love* and *praise* God for all eternity.

TWENTIETH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE IDEA THE SAINTS HAD OF HEAVEN.

The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us.— Rom. viii. 18.

THE sufferings of this life bear certainly no proportion to the joys prepared in Heaven. Because the sufferings of this life are short, and the joys of Heaven are everlasting. The sufferings of this life are never without some mixture of comfort, and the joys of Heaven are pure and unmixed. Finally, the sufferings of this life can never exceed a certain degree of violence, being limited by the natural weakness of the body; but the joys of Heaven being subjected in an incorruptible and immortal soul, are as boundless as her appetites and desires, which can be only satisfied with the possession of an infinite good.

This made the saints, both of the old and new law, set so high a value upon Heaven, as to strive to purchase it with the laborious endeavours, and the most painful sufferings either inflicted by others, or of their own free choice. St. Paul gives us this account of some part of their sufferings: *Others were racked, not accepting deliverance, that they might find a better resurrection. And others had*

trial of mockeries and stripes, moreover also of bands and prisons. They were stoned, they were cut asunder, they were tempted, they were put to death by the sword. They wandered about in sheep-skins, in goat-skins, being in want, distressed, afflicted: of whom the world was not worthy; wandering in deserts, in mountains, and in dens, and in caves of the earth. Heb. xi. 35, 36, &c.

Now since men's actions are but the natural result of their practical ideas of things; since we cannot make a truer judgment of the value a person has for any thing, than by the pains he takes for it, and the price he sets upon it: finally, since both the ideas and actions of the saints ought to be the model of ours, because it makes out clearly the way that leads to the happiness they possess, the whole design of this concluding discourse, of the *four last things*, shall be to give you some account of the great ideas the saints had of Heaven, and the value they set upon it.

The *kingdom of Heaven* is compared, by our Saviour, *to a merchant seeking good pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went his way, and sold all that he had, and bought it.* Matt. xiii. 45, 46. This *pearl* is the possession of God, by *grace* in this life, and in *glory* hereafter. Now that we may be encouraged to imitate this wise merchant, in sparing no cost or labour to purchase so great a treasure, we must take care to inform ourselves well of the true value of it. The lovers, therefore, of this world, must not be consulted in this matter; because their hearts being too sensibly affected with worldly objects, they are apt to judge of things with reference to what pleases or displeases for the present. *The sensual man* (says St. Paul, 1 Cor. ii. 14.) *perceiveth not these things that are of the spirit of God: For it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand: because it is spiritually examined.*

Hence it is, that the lovers of this world are, by the word of God, stiled *fools* and *children*. Because, as fools and children have not judgment enough to know false stones from diamonds, and are often better pleased with a pretty bauble than the richest jewel; so the lovers of this world, are much fonder of the toys and trifles wherewith it amuses them for the present, than the solid treasures of the life to come. And so it is no wonder, that the price of Heaven is fallen so low in the general opinion of mankind, and that

so few are heartily disposed, I will not say, *to sell all they have to purchase it*, but even to do or suffer any thing considerable for it.

But the saints who were animated with the spirit of God, and had their hearts free from all bias of earthly affections, are the only proper judges in this case. *But we* (says St. Paul) *have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are given unto us by God.* From these then, we must learn the true value of this *rich pearl;* and we need but take a view of their lives and sufferings, to be thoroughly convinced of the great idea they had of it. For deeds are the most faithful interpreters of the mind; and he who spares no pains or cost to compass the end he aims at, shews plainly how near it lies to his heart, and that it has the preference of all other things.

First, then, let us consider the laborious and suffering lives of the primitive planters of the gospel; I mean, the blessed Apostles, and other apostolic men, who have earned Heaven, as I may say, with the labour of their hands, and sweat of their brows. What hardships have they not endured in *hunger* and *thirst, heat* and *cold, weariness* and *watchings*, interior *solicitudes* and *troubles, poverty* and *nakedness, contumelies, derisions*, and *persecutions!* How were they continually harassed, with long and painful journies, to carry the faith of Christ into barbarous and savage nations! What dangers have they not run through by land and sea! What difficulties have they not struggled with in banishments and prisons; being every where, both by reason of their poverty, and the mortal hatred their enemies bore them, destitute of the ordinary comforts and conveniencies of life.

And what induced these faithful labourers in Christ's vineyard, who naturally loved their liberty and ease, as well as other mortals, to undertake so difficult and laborious a task, and continue indefatigably in it to their last breath? Their encouragement was the firm hope they had of seeing themselves one day rewarded with the eternal repose of the life to come; *expecting the blessed hope, and coming of the great God.* This they looked upon not only as a sufficient, but superabundant recompense of all the hardships and labours they could undergo. This *blessed hope* was the cordial that daily gave new life and spirit to their actions,

and kept them from fainting under the burden with which they were charged. And if they regretted any thing, it was to see how little they were able to do, to answer the bounty of a master, who had prepared such glorious rewards for them; and that they had but each, one single life to employ in his service.

In the next place, let us take a view of all those illustrious champions, who have gone to heaven through *fire* and *water*, as the scripture expresses it; that is, through all the severest trials that art or malice could invent, to make the passage frightful to them. Here we shall see innumerable persons of all ages and conditions, running to *racks*, *gibbets*, *scourges* and *axes*, with the same eagerness and alacrity of mind, as if they were hastening to some agreeable entertainment: Some were torn limb from limb by wild beasts; others thrown into boiling cauldrons; others broiled alive upon gridirons; others nipped with red-hot pincers; others, beaten to death with scorpions, rods, plummets; others, finally, after the mangling of their limbs, condemned to undergo a lingering martyrdom in mines or dungeons.

But the manner how these Christian heroes suffered, is yet more remarkable than their sufferings. For, instead of betraying any weakness or impatience under the aforementioned trials, they rather behaved themselves like men affected with some exquisite pleasure; some singing canticles of joy; others, fearless of their tormentors; and all glorifying God, for having judged them worthy to suffer in his cause: Which plainly shews, the great idea they had of the happy state towards which they were hastening; and that they were heartily convinced, with the blessed Apostle, *that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

They doubted not but Heaven was worth infinitely more than they were able to do, or suffer for it; and that it was a very advantageous bargain, to purchase eternal and incomprehensible joys with transitory pains, though ever so grievous for the time: This consideration made death itself, though in its most terrifying shapes, appear beautiful and delightful to them. Because they regarded it only as a secure passage to a better life: and though the passage was full of difficulty and terror, the blessed land

beyond it presented before their eyes a prospect so glorious and charming, as inspired them with a generous resolution to break through all difficulties, and fight to the last drop of blood to force their way to it.

Lastly, Let us consider the wonderful lives of those holy saints, whom the church honours with the title of *confessors;* who though they spilt not their blood, nor laid down their lives to obtain the crown, yet they daily sacrificed to God their wills and inclinations; which, if well considered, will appear a sacrifice no less generous, and, in regard of its long continuation, perhaps more difficult, than what is offered with effusion of blood. For to live in the world, and be utterly dead to all worldly affections; to have all the usual inclinations of nature, and at the same time to live in a total contradiction to them, has something in it so tiresome and painful, that it is a task of a more than ordinary patience and resolution, not to be overcome or wearied by it.

Yet, this hard task many thousands have undertaken, and gone through with it: They denied themselves whatever nature loves, and made choice of every thing that is disagreeable and painful to it: They renounced the conveniencies and diversions of cities, to pass their days in solitary caves and hideous deserts: They preferred poverty to riches; humiliations and contempt, to honours and preferments; obedience and suffering, to liberty and ease. In a word, their whole time was spent in the most laborious exercises of penance, without any further allowance of relaxation, than was absolutely necessary to support life, and prolong their painful exile.

Now, this wonderful self-denying method of these holy saints, shews plainly what their thoughts were of the life to come, and how they undervalued this world in comparison to it; in effect, their hearts rested where there treasure was laid up; and their treasure being in Heaven, they looked upon the earth with a generous disdain, rejecting all the offers it could make them, either of honours, riches or pleasures; and accepting no other satisfaction for the present, than the hopes of a blessed eternity hereafter: So that we may justly say of them, that *having found one pearl of great price, they went and sold all they had, and bought it.* For they reserved nothing for themselves, not even the desire of any earthly goods, but with their wills made all over

to God; *counting* with the Apostle, *all things as dung, that they might gain Christ.*

Now, then, to draw some practical instructions from what has been said: since these holy saints were undoubtedly animated with, and directed by the spirit of God, both their judgment of things, and the example of their lives, carries a very great weight, and ought to serve us as lights to walk by. First, then we are to learn from the idea they had of Heaven, that we ought to regard it as our supreme good; that all this world is nothing to it, and consequently that any earthly thing, of whatever moment it appears to be, if it pretends to stand in competition with it, is to be postponed and sacrificed to it. And here no manner of abatement can be allowed. For whoever is not heartily convinced, that Heaven is to be preferred before all things in this world, errs in the very first principle of Christian morality, makes the whole gospel void, and shews himself to be in a criminal state.

But when we are well fixed in this great principle, and have settled a right judgment of the happy state we are to aim at, the next lesson we are to learn of the saints is, how to secure our pretensions to it; and here we are to take directions from the method of their lives. My meaning is, not that we are bound to bear up to the rigour of the penances they practised, because they are neither proportioned to the measure of every one's strength, nor consistent with all states or conditions. And the self same practices, which are a means to sanctify some, may be a snare to others, and occasion their ruin, if undertaken by such as are not sufficiently qualified for the performance.

However, since it is impossible that means directly opposite should have a tendency to the self-same end, we conclude, that Heaven is not to be attained to, but by those who are, in some degree, within the limits of that way, in which the saints have walked; and that they who in the method of their lives differ so far from them, as to bear no manner of resemblance with them, pretend in vain to the happy state they enjoy.

Now of this number are, *first*, all those who live in a state of wilful sin; and the deeper they are engaged in it, the farther they are out of their way to Heaven: Nor can anything secure their return to it, but an entire change.—For *east* and *west* are not more opposite, than the way of

these unhappy Christians are to those of the saints, which, therefore, if continued, must unavoidably bring them to everlasting perdition.

Whence it follows, 2*dly*, that they who live in the practice of any unjust dealing, cannot pretend to walk in the footsteps of the saints; since these were so far from coveting their neighbours' goods, that, for the most part, they even renounced those, which they might have lawfully possessed.

Thirdly, it appears, that neither they who study to pass their time in a circle of worldly pleasures, nor they who are so filled with the solicitudes of this life, as to forget the concerns of the next, bear any manner of resemblance with the pattern I have proposed: For what resemblance have pleasures with mortifications, gratifying self-love with self-denials, or a total neglect of salvation, with a continual studious application to it? These are as wide from one another as things can be, and can have no relation to the same end, but must of a necessity terminate in very different states.

It is therefore beyond all question, that nothing can render us in any measure, either conformable to the saints now, or happy with them hereafter, but a life of *penance*. However, that we may not be frightened with this doctrine, which is expressly taught, both by the *gospel* and the *council* of *Trent*, nor at a loss about the manner how to put it in practice, I dare confidently say, no man will miss of his aim in it, who will but constantly and uniformly comply, *first*, with the general duties of Christianity: and 2*dly*, with all particular obligations of his respective state. For in making good both these parts of a Christian life, so many difficulties and contradictions will occur, that it is scarce possible, for any day to pass without furnishing him with such frequent occasions of denying himself, as will, of necessity, put him into the way of penance.

For, *first*, it will oblige him to a faithful observance, both of all the commandments of God, and precepts of the church: And to comply with these, nature must be frequently contradicted, and many penitential duties performed, by way of necessary means; as those of prayer, fasting, reading, frequenting the sacraments, avoiding the occasions of sin, restraining the liberty of the senses, and the like.

2*dly*, It will, over and above, oblige him to many duties particularly specified in the gospel; as doing acts of charity,

pardoning injuries, returning good for evil, bearing patiently all crosses whatsoever, and many other duties; in the discharge whereof, as being very contrary to the inclinations born with us, corrupt nature cannot avoid being often mortified, and in a state of violence to itself.

Lastly, It will oblige him to deprive himself of many satisfactions, inconsistent with the discharge of the particular duties of his state, and put him daily under more or less restraint; which is always painful to the natural love we have of liberty, and the desire we have of gratifying the present humour: to say nothing of the many oppositions a Christian will meet with from abroad, occasioned by the importunate solicitations of some, and the reflections or railleries of others, which often prove a harder trial to him than all the difficulties arising from the inward repugnance of temper or inclination.

Now, from all these instances, it plainly follows, that a Christian and penitential life are so linked together, that they are wholly inseparable; and that to practise Christianity in its full extent, is to walk within the limits of that path which the saints have chalked out to us, and will certainly entitle us to a share in the happiness they possess: For though it be not by degrees so narrow, as what they voluntarily chose to walk in, it is still the narrow way of the gospel, that is, the way of penance and self-denial, as I have shewed.

And this will fully answer the frivolous pretence of those who say, they cannot lead a penitential life, or do penance. I grant they cannot practise the solitude of a Paul in the desert, nor the fasts and watchings of the ancient monks, nor the poverty of a Francis. But there is a penitential life of an inferior degree, proportioned to every one's strength; and this being no other than a Christian life, as I have described it, and consisting precisely in a faithful discharge of all Christian duties, with regard to every one's respective circumstances, to pretend to be incapable of this, is pretending an incapacity to live as a Christian ought to do.—It is, in effect, to throw off the sweet yoke of the gospel, and give up all pretensions to Heaven. For, he who performs not the conditions of the covenant made with God, forfeits his title to the reward; and the same causes, whatever they be, which occasion his pretended incapacity of the one, render him unworthy of the other.

However, we are bound to thank God's infinite goodness, with the deepest sense of gratitude, for having it in our power to secure our eternal happiness upon such easy terms. For though he had obliged us to all the most rigorous penances that ever have been practised, we ought undoubtedly to have paid a cheerful submission to his orders; since infinite and everlasting joys cannot but be bought cheap at any rate whatever. But since, in consideration of our weakness, he requires so very little of us comparatively to what many others have done and suffered for them, we cannot, without undervaluing his goodness, reject the easy terms demanded of us.

It is true, Heaven is not to be carried without violence to corrupt nature; because the very doing of our duty is a violence to it. But how cheerfully should we engage in this combat, if we reflected seriously upon the infinite value of the crown to be gained by it! Oh, if we but considered daily, what it is to be for ever happy with God, all our pretended difficulties would soon vanish. But the reason why we set so low a price upon Heaven is, because we scarce ever consider it as we ought. We allow it, perhaps, some passing glances, but the world takes up almost all our serious thoughts: And hence it is, that our hearts, being fixed upon this present life, we are ready to sit down with the poor satisfaction it offers us, and say, in a quite contrary sense to St. Peter: *Lord, it is good for us to be here.*

Preserve us, O God, from this fatal blindness, and inspire us with such ardent desires of the blessed joys prepared in Heaven, that nothing in this world may obstruct our everlasting possession of them.

TWENTY-FIRST ENTERTAINMENT.

OF SIN.

THE UNHAPPY STATE OF A SOUL IN MORTAL SIN.

He that loveth iniquity hateth his own soul. Psal. x. 6.

Neither *death* nor *judgment* would be terrible were it not for sin. Nay, death would not have entered into the world, if sin had not introduced it. It is to sin alone we owe all the scourges, wherewith God visits us in this life. Wars, plagues and famines, with the whole train of calamities that attend them, are but the fruits of sin. It was

sin drove the angels out of Heaven, and our first parents out of Paradise. Finally, it is sin alone can make us forfeit our title to Heaven, and condemn us to eternal flames.

This then is the monster I am now going to describe. *Malice, insolence, rebellion,* and *ingratitude,* are its inseparable properties. Its *malice* appears in the mischief it does to the soul, to which it is a mortal poison. Its *insolence, rebellion* and *ingratitude,* strike at God himself, to whom it is infinitely injurious. The mischief it does to the soul, that is, the unhappy state of a soul in mortal sin, shall be the whole subject of this Entertainment.

To represent the unhappy state of a soul in mortal sin, I need but compare it with the happy state from which she falls by consenting to it. For the large distance between the two extremes, compared together, will shew the height to which she was elevated in the one, and the lowness into which she is sunk in the other; in the one she will appear all beautiful, but in the other her beauty is destroyed, as with a noisome leprosy. She is covered with ulcers and sores, and turned into a hideous monster. In the one, she is not only the noblest creature upon earth, but enriched with treasures of inestimable value; and in the other she becomes most vile and abject, is the scorn of those that were her friends, the derision of her enemies, and reduced to the utmost extremity of poverty and nakedness. Finally, we shall see her in her happy state of grace, raised to be a rival, even of angels; *thou hast made him very little inferior to angels;* and in the unhappy state of sin, sunk into the despicable condition of brute beasts, *he has been compared to beasts, and is become like unto them.* Oh! what a dreadful change, what a frightful fall is this!

Nay, her condition is yet lower, and to be compared even with that of the infernal spirits, allowing only for her power of change, which never leaves her as long as she is united to a mortal body. For since it is a certain truth that the same cause applied to a proper subject, must needs produce the same effect, it follows, that as one single mortal sin transformed the apostate angels into the hideous and unfortunate creatures they now are, so it must also transform a soul, consenting to it, into the same state of misery and deformity: And were it as unchangeable and permanent as that of the devils, it would be the same as theirs in the sight of God; that is, the object of his everlasting hatred:

Whereas now, though she be the object of God's wrath, and with reference to her sinful state, even of his hatred, yet since she has been redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, she is also an object of compassion to him, and capable of his mercy, whenever she renders herself worthy of it by sincere repentance.

This is a general account of the unhappy state of a soul fallen into mortal sin; which, that it may be fully made out, and set forth so as to inspire us with an abhorrence of so foul a monster, I shall endeavour to expose to your view, first, all the advantages and treasures which a soul possesses by her being in the state of grace, and then the losses she suffers, and the miseries she is plunged into, by consenting to mortal sin. But to do this clearly, it will be requisite to give you some idea of the nature and essence of *sanctifying grace*, and all the noble prerogatives and admirable effects that attend it.

When therefore we say, that a soul is in the *state of grace*, the meaning of it is, that she either has preserved, or recovered the *sanctifying grace* she received at her *baptism*, which is called the *laver of regeneration;* because whoever is washed in it, receives a *second birth;* and as he was first born of *flesh and blood*, so he is then *reborn of God*, according to the scripture language.

Now this grace which we receive in *baptism*, or recover by *penance*, is a *certain supernatural quality infused by the Holy Ghost into the soul*, or a certain *heavenly splendour*, which purifies the soul from all stains of sin, and renders her acceptable in the eyes of God. It is called *grace*, because it is a *gratuitous gift:* and it is called *sanctifying* or *justifying* grace, because it renders the person to whom it is communicated *just* and *holy*. From a *child of wrath* and everlasting perdition, he becomes the *adoptive son of God*, and from a slave of the devil, his soul becomes the beloved spouse of Jesus Christ.

This is not all; for *sanctifying grace* never comes unattended. At its first entrance into the soul by *baptism*, it introduces with it the three infused *theological virtues*, of *faith*, *hope* and *charity*. And at its return by *penance*, it revives *faith*, which was left *dead* by sin; strengthens *hope*, which was left languishing and feeble; and restores *charity*, which was banished from the soul. *Charity* returning brings back with it the whole treasure of *merits* acquired by our

past good words. Neither does it only recover this whole precious treasure, formerly laid up by works of piety, and forfeited by sin, but improves it daily by each meritorious work, whereof it is the source or principle.

Hence it is, that sanctifying grace is called the *life of the soul*, because whoever is without this grace is without charity; and *he who is without charity remains in death*, says St. John. So that the soul receives proportionably the same advantages from grace, as the body receives from its union with the soul. And therefore, as the body is of itself but a deformed lump of dead flesh, incapable of beauty, strength or motion, but what the soul communicates to it; so whatever advantages of life the soul enjoys, as beauty, vigour, or power of acting, I mean in order to eternal life, is all owing to sanctifying grace.

Grace then adorning in this manner, and enriching the soul with these precious jewels of *faith*, *hope*, and *charity*, the most beautiful of the three, makes her a dwelling-place fit for God himself to honour her with his sacred presence, according to St. John, who tells us, that *whoever remains in charity remains in God, and God in him:* so that by grace, and charity, its inseparable attendant, man's soul is consecrated, as it were into a sumptuous temple, where God is pleased to inhabit, as Christ himself at his last sermon, says, *whoever loveth me will keep my word, and my father will love him; and I and my Father will come and make our abode with him.* And St. Paul, in his epistle to the Corinthians, makes use of this argument to deter them from defiling their souls with sin, because they are *the temple of the living God.* And this is the first excellency or prerogative of a soul adorned with *sanctifying grace*, and the habits of *infused virtues*, which attends it.

The second is, that a person in the state of grace is, as I have already hinted, the *adoptive son of God:* the most honourable title a rational creature is capable of. A title so noble, that St. Louis of France preferred it, with just reason, before that of being monarch of the most flourishing kingdom of Europe, and bore always a greater respect for the place of his *baptism*, than that of his *instalment* or *coronation.* God has but one *eternal begotten Son*, to wit, Jesus Christ, the *second Person* of the *blessed Trinity:* And the nearest approach a pure creature can make to it, is that of being his *adoptive son*,

The Roman emperors, (if we may be allowed to compare great things with little ones) when they would reward any person of eminent service and merit, adopted him into the *imperial family:* And this was the most signal mark of honour and favour they could bestow upon him. What an honour is it then for a poor mortal creature, and miserable worm of the earth, to be adopted, as I may say, into the *divine family* of the most adored and blessed *Trinity!* What honour to become the adoptive son, not of a mortal man, who, though loaden with the pompous titles of this world, is himself but dust and ashes, but of the great God, and king of Heaven and earth! *See* (says St. John,) *the great bounty of the Father towards us, in that we are called, and are the sons of God!* He says not barely that we are *called* the sons of God, but to prevent our imagining it to be a mere title, without anything real or solid in it, he tells us, that as we bear that name, so we *are the sons of God.*

From this prerogative of a person in the state of grace, flow immediately two others, viz. his being the *brother of Jesus Christ, and co-heir of his eternal kingdom.* The first of these is expressly taught by St. Paul, who in his second chapter to the Hebrews tells them, that *since he who sanctifies, and they who are sanctified, are all of the same,* that is, *children of the same Father, for* this reason *Christ did not disdain to call them his brethren.* And the second, viz. their undoubted claim to a partnership in the everlasting inheritance, is declared by the same apostle, in these words, *but if we were sons, we were likewise heirs; truly the heirs of God, and co-heirs of Jesus Christ* O, what a blessing is this, to be entitled to eternal joys! To be the heirs of a kingdom that will never end! to have an undoubted title to a crown, of which no treachery of men, no revolutions of states, no length of time can ever dispossess us.

This therefore is the happy condition of a person in the state of grace; which I have placed before your eyes, to let you see the height from which he falls, and the profound abyss of misery into which he plunges himself, when he consents to mortal sin. For in that very instant he loses all the treasures he possessed, forfeits the blessings he enjoyed, and is divested of all the noble titles he was honoured with. In the happy state of grace, his soul was the darling

of Heaven, the object of God's love, and the joy of saints and angels; but in the moment he consents to mortal sin, he loses the friendship of Almighty God, becomes the object of his wrath; Heaven frowns upon him, and the saints and angels, espousing the quarrel of their injured master, regard him with disdain and horror. He is now no longer the *adoptive son of God, nor brother of Jesus Christ, nor heir of Heaven.* All these noble titles vanish in a moment; his name is struck out of the book of life; he is degraded and disinherited by his heavenly Father; he is disowned by Jesus Christ, and regarded as an enemy and traitor, as a slave of the devil, a confederate of Hell, and a child of everlasting perdition.

And what becomes now of that beautiful temple, where God delighted to dwell? what becomes of all those precious ornaments, those inestimable treasures of virtues and merits that adorned and enriched it? alas, as soon as grace is expelled and sin enters into its place, there remains nothing but a frightful scene of desolation and horror.—Imagine the destruction of some rich and noble city, surprised and plundered by a furious enemy: or represent to your thoughts the city of Jerusalem, as it is described by Christ, laid level with the ground, its inhabitants destroyed by fire and sword, and, of all its lofty palaces and towers, not one stone left upon another: represent this, I say, to your thoughts, and you will have some weak idea of what happens to a soul, when she consents to mortal sin; for as that unfortunate city, which is the figure of a sinful soul, was, as Josephus relates, abandoned by its *tutelar angels*, whose voices were heard in the temple to say, *let us depart from hence;* so the instant that sin is accomplished by a full consent of the will, the Holy Ghost abandons the temple of the soul, as a place polluted and profaned, and delivers it up to become a prey to its most cruel enemy the devil, who immediately enters in as an insulting conqueror, seizes upon all its precious ornaments, rifles all its treasures, destroys its very foundations, which are *sanctifying grace* and *charity;* and to verify the figure to the full, leaves not one stone upon another of all that noble structure, which was the delight of Heaven, and chosen by God himself for his abode.

These are the fruits of sin; this is the *abomination of desolation*, which it brings into the living temple of God;

this the unhappy change it produces in the soul of him who consents to it. He is from that instant dead to God, and in his eyes no more than a loathsome carcase; because deprived of grace, which gave life and beauty to the soul, was the foundation of all her happiness, and the source of all her merits, which are all rendered fruitless, like a plentiful harvest, swept away by a sudden inundation. Though he had served God as many years as old Hilarion; though he had given away all he possessed in alms to the poor; though he had prayed and fasted all his life, and practised all the austerities of the ancient Fathers in the desert; finally, though he had heaped up good works upon good works, even sufficient to entitle him to an eminent degree of glory in Heaven, one single mortal sin robs him of all, cancels all, renders all void and fruitless, and reduces him to a state of poverty and nakedness. *The virtue he has practised shall be no more remembered*, says the prophet Ezekiel: his fasts are all forgot; the treasures of alms, which he had laid up in Heaven, turn to no account; his prayers have lost all their merit and value: Nothing remains, nothing subsists, he is bankrupt of all, and like a broken merchant to begin again.

Oh, how deplorable is his condition! how inestimable are his losses! But to comprise them all in one single word, he has lost his God; and if he dies in that state, he has lost him for ever; which according to the general doctrines of divines, is the greatest punishment of the damned; and surpasses all their other torments. Nay, St. Thomas of Acquin demonstrates, that the loss of God, even in this life, is an evil infinitely greater than all the pains which Heaven and earth can inflict upon us. Though God should give full power to all mankind to do us all the mischief that art and malice can invent; though he should deliver us up to be tormented by evil spirits, and suffer us to fall under the greatest afflictions both of body and mind, yet our misfortune would be infinitely less than that of a sinner who loses God: because all other misfortunes are but privations of temporal goods, but the loss of God is the loss of an infinite good; and since all losses are greater or smaller evils, in proportion to the value of the goods they deprive us of, it follows that mortal sin, by which alone we lose God, is the greatest evil that can happen to us.

Hence it is no wonder that Christ, whose ideas of things

are infinitely just and perfect, wept over Lazarus and the city of Jerusalem, and yet refused the tears of those pious women, who attended on him in his passion. For Lazarus was the figure of a soul dead in sin, and Jerusalem the type of reprobate sinners, but himself the pattern of suffering innocence. And therefore Christ by weeping over them, and refusing the tears of the holy women, gave us to understand that there is but one thing in this world, viz. sin, which fully deserves our tears, and that a person labouring under the heaviest load of sufferings, is not so great an object of compassion, as a soul in mortal sin.

Sin therefore is an evil that justly challenges our tears. All sufferings of the body, though ever so great, are but imaginary evils, if compared with sin. Job on the dunghill was a happy man, because he was free from mortal sin; and a monarch on the throne, though favoured with all the blessings, and wallowing in all the pleasures of life, is infinitely unhappy, if he be in a state of mortal sin. The saints and angels in heaven, if they were capable of sensible impressions, would weep over him; and Jesus Christ himself, if his state of glory could admit of grief and tears, would lament his unhappy condition. Let us then lament our sins with such true penitential tears, as may wash off their stains, and be a source of life and grace to our souls.

TWENTY-SECOND ENTERTAINMENT.

SIN CONSIDERED AS IT REGARDS GOD.

To thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before thee. Psal. l. 6.

In the foregoing discourse I have only described sin from its effects upon the soul. But the words of my text lead me to its very essence and nature, which consist precisely in its being an offence committed against the infinite majesty of God; and though the mischief it does to the soul be the greatest evil that can happen to us in this world, as I have already shewn, yet this discovers but one part of its malice. But the injury it does to God, in violating his holy law, is that which constitutes its principal deformity, and shall be the subject of this Entertainment.

To form a just idea of the injury we do to God by mortal sin, we must consider with a serious attention, what

divines and spiritual writers teach, viz. that every mortal sin, whether committed by thought, word, or deed, is an offence of infinite malice. Neither must we understand the word infinite, as it is often used by the vulgar to express anything that is very great; but we must take it in its obvious and literal meaning, and according to its full import. Because it is not the business of divines to set off Christian truths with flourishes of rhetoric, but to explain them simply and naturally, as they are in themselves. And therefore when they say, that the malice or deformity of sin is infinite, their meaning is, that the injury it does to God exceeds all bounds and measure; that whatever can be practised between man and man holds no proportion to it; finally, that it surpasses all human comprehension. So that, though we should imagine the foulest and blackest treason man's heart is capable of; nay, though we should load it with all the most aggravating circumstances, as of perjury to a sovereign, of treachery to a bosom friend, of ingratitude to a benefactor, or any thing else we can think of, to render it odious and detestable in the eyes of men, yet the malice or foulness of it in relation to the party, on whom we should suppose it practised, would bear no proportion with that of the least mortal sin, as regards Almighty God. Because, whatever passes between man and man has its bounds and limits fixed, and whatever is limited, cannot enter into comparison with what is infinite and unlimited.

For this reason the royal Prophet seems to make no account of that part of his crime, which regard Urias and Bethshabe, and appears sensible only of the injury he had done to God, to whom he addresses himself in the forementioned remarkable words of my text, *To thee alone have I sinned, and done evil in thy sight.* He had certainly injured both Urias and Bethshabe in a very heinous manner, having murdered the one, and drawn the other into adultery. Nay, he had done evil in the eyes of men as well as before God. For he had given public scandal, and (as the prophet Nathan reproached him) *had made the enemies of God blaspheme his holy name.* But the heinousness of the injury he hath done to God, both by the one and the other, outweighed so far the wrong he had done to men, that his repentance was wholly grounded on that motive; as appears yet farther from his answer to Nathan, who though he represented to him in the most pathetic manner possible, the

unnatural wrong he had done his faithful servant Urias, received from him no other confession of his sin but this, *peccavi Domino*, I have sinned against the Lord.

Sin, therefore, to speak properly, is hateful in itself precisely as it is an offence to God. This constitutes its essential deformity and malice: And even those sins which regard our neighbour immediately, as calumny, detraction, murder, adultery, theft, and the like, derive their whole enormity from their opposition to the eternal law established by God; and since the majesty of God, who is injured and dishonoured by the violation of his holy law, is infinite, hence all divines conclude, that the malice of sin is also infinite: And this they demonstrate by this unanswerable proof, viz. because as honour takes its degree of value from him who pays it, so the dishonour of an offence or affront, is measured from the dignity of character of him who receives it.

This is one of those truths that carry self-evidence with them, and are clearest in their own light: So that to go about to prove them, is like setting up a candle to see the sun by: We all know, by the light of natural reason, that to shew a contempt of a superior, is a greater offence than if he were our equal, or inferior. That to affront a sovereign prince is a more heinous crime, than if we did the same thing to a private man: In a word, that it is a greater indignity to injure and abuse a parent, friend, or benefactor, than if he were a person that has no connexion with us. Now, what is it that makes all this appear so evident, but the natural notion all men have, that the grievousness of an offence falls or rises according to the dignity or character of the party offended? So that the greater his dignity or character is, the greater also in proportion is an offence committed against him: The consequence whereof is, that since the majesty of God is both infinite in itself, and infinitely exalted above his creatures, the enormity of an offence committed against him is also infinite.

Nay, we may say, that as God is infinite, not only in his nature and essence, but in all his attributes and perfections, so there is a kind of infinity of malice implied, not only in sin itself, that is, precisely as it is a violation of God's law, which is its proper definition, but in all its circumstances and properties. So that as the majesty, the goodness, justice, power, and wisdom of God are infinite, so the dis-

obedience, ingratitude, injustice, insolence, and folly, which attend the violation of his holy law, are all crimes, that carry with them an infinite deformity, because each is directly opposite to some attribute that is infinitely perfect.

Hence all sinners are guilty of an infinite ingratitude, because they offend a God, who is infinitely good and bountiful. They commit an infinite injustice and extravagance in transgressing the law of God, who is infinitely just and wise. Their presumption is also infinite, in rebeling against an infinite power and majesty. In a word, there appears something so excessively monstrous in every circumstance of mortal sin, as neither thoughts can distinctly represent, nor words express. The rebellion of a poor creature against the King of Heaven and earth, his insolence, in daring to disobey God's holy law, his barefaced contempt of him, in renouncing his friendship for some interest or pleasure; finally, his insensibility of so many benefits already received, and blessings still in store for him, are every one, in their kind, of so black a nature, that though upon reflection, we have a kind of confused idea of something that is very foul and monstrous, yet we are conscious to ourselves that not only our ideas come infinitely short of the thing itself, but that we even want words to express our imperfect ideas of it.

But to proceed now to a second proof, made use of by divines, to demonstrate this truth: It is certain that God, who is infinitely just and merciful, and more inclined, as I may say, to acts of mercy than justice, cannot demand a satisfaction surpassing the grievousness of an offence committed against him. *Mercy* and *goodness* may indeed cancel a whole debt *gratis*, or remit a part of it; but *justice* can never exact more than the full payment of it: And, therefore, whatever satisfaction God can demand, is, at the highest, but equal to the injury he has received. Judge then of the nature of sin; judge of its malice and enormity; judge of the injury and dishonour it does to God, from the reparation or satisfaction he has demanded, and has effectually been made for it; I mean the humiliations and sufferings of Jesus Christ: For, as this is an instance of the most rigid justice that ever was practised since the creation of the world, and surpasses infinitely all the severities, by which God has ever manifested his hatred to sin, so it suffices alone to demonstrate its foulness and enormity.

However, that it may be rightly understood, you must not imagine, as if I laid any stress upon, or drew any arguments from the greatness of our Saviour's humiliations and sufferings, considered barely in themselves; they were doubtless very great, even from the moment of his conception, to the last gasp on the cross. But how great soever they were, nay, though they had been far greater in themselves, and all offered up to satisfy the divine justice, yet if they had been undergone by any person of a rank inferior to that of Jesus Christ, they would have been ineffectual, nay, infinitely disproportioned to the satisfaction which God required. Nay, though the highest *seraphim* in heaven had offered himself to become man, and suffered all the torments God's wrath could inflict upon him, yet all this had been insufficient; the whole debt had remained uncancelled, and the *hand-writing* that appeared against us, would have stood in full force.

The reason is, because God demanded nothing less than an equality of justice, or *condign satisfaction*, as divines call it, that is, an atonement answerable to the injury that had been done to his infinite majesty; or, to speak more plainly, a reparation of honour equal to the affront he had received by the disobedience of our first parents.

Now it is evident, that no pure creature, though ever so excellent, was capable of making any such reparation. For if any pure creature had been capable of it, then God had been unjust in exacting infinitely more than was due to him; that is, in exacting that this reparation should be made by no other than the person of his *only Son*, whose dignity being infinite, gave an infinite value to every thing he did or suffered. And it is precisely from this, I mean the infinite dignity of Christ's sacred person, that we must make an estimate of the *price* that was paid down, and by consequence of the *debt* that was cancelled by it. Every action of Jesus Christ was of an infinite value. His descending to become man, his perfect obedience in all things to the will of his Father, and offering himself to him as a sacrifice of expiation, were all infinite humiliations, by which he paid to God an infinite honour; and since the divine justice demanded this of him, for reparation of the affront he had received, it follows, that the debt which was owing could not be fully discharged, nor the *hand-writing that was against us* fully cancelled upon any other terms; and that by con-

sequence, as God was *infinitely honoured* by the obedience and humiliation of his Son, who was equal to him in all things, so he had been *infinitely dishonoured* by the pride and disobedience of our first parents.

Thus we see the malice and enormity of mortal sin; it is the greatest evil that can befal the soul, and it is infinitely injurious to Almighty God. How comes it then that we detest not this infernal monster with the greatest hatred our hearts are capable of! How comes it that we fly not from it, as from the face of a venomous serpent, that would sting us to death! Nay, how comes it that we admit it so easily into our hearts, and when we are so unhappy as to have yielded to it, we shew so little concern to be delivered from it! It is not to be doubted, indeed, but that the corruption of man's nature, the fuel of sin we carry about us, and the violence of temptations, are in a great measure the source of this fatal blindness: However, it is no less certain, that the fuel of sin would be very much weakened, and the violence of temptations very much abated, if we had but a strong faith and lively sense of the truths I have enlarged upon; because this would inspire us with such a hatred of sin, as would in a great degree counterbalance our natural proneness to it.

If then we make it our daily practice, or at least as often as we prepare ourselves for the *sacrament* of *penance*, to reflect seriously upon the malice and enormity of mortal sin, it is to be hoped, that by degrees it would work this effect upon us, and lay in us so deep a foundation of hatred and detestation of it, as would arm us against the most violent assaults of corrupt nature: The reason is clear; because it would form in us a strong conviction, that sin is the greatest evil that can befal us; and since all evils, represented as such, are objects which we cannot but hate and fear, this conviction would insensibly make at least the same impression upon us, and work us into an equal hatred and fear of sin, as we usually have of any considerable temporal evil, when the idea of it is lively represented to our thoughts.—Now, if sin were but as much feared and hated, as those things which all reasonable men regard as great evils, it is not to be doubted but relapses, even into the most secret sins, would become as rare as those crimes which are attended with infamy and ruin in this world.

Let us suppose God had ordered things so, that every

sin, though ever so secretly committed, should be punished upon the spot, with some very violent pain; equal, for example, to that of the rack, or being burnt alive; I ask whether, in that case, it be probable that any temptation or allurement would be strong enough to overcome us? surely no: For it appears more rational to judge, that in the case supposed, even the most violent temptations would be rejected with horror; the reason is, because the fear of so great an evil would be a powerful counterpoise, and plead more effectually for our resisting, than corrupt nature for our yielding to them. In like manner, therefore, if we had a strong and lively apprehension of the evil of sin, if we were practically convinced that it is the greatest evil that can happen to us, as it most undoubtedly is, this would create in us so great a fear and detestation of it, that the violence of temptations, which is now the usual apology for relapses, would meet a check and counterpoise equal to that in the case supposed, and instead of drawing us into any sinful consent, only furnish us with an occasion to encrease our merit.

Let us, therefore, consider seriously what sin is; let us consider it over and over again, that it may make a sensible impression upon us: Let us consider that it is the enemy of God and our souls; that it is a mortal poison, which deprives us in a moment of that life, which ought to be most precious to us; that it robs us of the love and friendship of Almighty God, which is a treasure of infinite value; that, finally, it makes us slaves of the devil, and if death surprises us in that state, renders us eternally unhappy. And are not these most powerful inducements to hate and detest it?

However, let us not stop here, but from the consideration of the dreadful evils we fall into by consenting to mortal sin, let us pass on to consider how grievously displeasing it is to Almighty God. Let us consider, that every mortal sin is an offence of infinite malice, because committed against an infinite *majesty*, and that God is infinitely dishonoured by it; let us consider that the *apostate angels* were doomed to everlasting flames for one mortal sin; finally, that one mortal sin excluded Adam, and his whole posterity, from the kingdom of God: and that the gates of Heaven would have been eternally shut against us, had not the *Son of God* himself become a victim of reconciliation, and made atonement to God for the injury he had received.

Oh, what a dreadful offence is that which nothing less than the *blood of Jesus Christ* can atone for! How immense is the debt of sin, for which nothing but an infinite treasure can satisfy!

This consideration carries the greatest weight with it, and gives us the clearest and fullest idea of the enormity of mortal sin; which therefore is the most solid motive to ground our repentance upon, whenever we prepare ourselves for the sacrament of penance; because this motive, if well considered, will inspire us with a hatred of sin it itself; that is, precisely as it is *an offence of God:* and whoever hates sin, because God is offended with it, cannot but have that filial love in his heart, which is the best pledge of his reconciliation to him; and then our repentance will be like that of the royal Prophet, expressed in these few words, *I have sinned against the Lord;* which was so acceptable to God, that Nathan was immediately inspired to pronounce his pardon; and so effectual in itself, that we do not read it was ever followed by any relapse, at least into any sin of the same kind. If, therefore, our repentance be grounded upon the same solid motive, the pardon of our sins will be no less sure, and our amendment as effectual, if by repeated considerations we labour to work ourselves into a hatred of sin, equal to that of the royal Prophet; whereof he has left us this authentic declaration in the 118th Psalm, *I have hated and abominated sin, but thy law have I loved.*

TWENTY-THIRD ENTERTAINMENT.

OF THE AGGRAVATIONS THAT ATTEND RELAPSES INTO MORTAL SIN.

The last state of that man becomes worse than the first.
Luke xi. 26.

THE parable whereof these words are the close, is thus set forth by St. Luke: *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through places without water, seeking rest, and finding not, he saith, I will return into my house whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then he goeth and taketh with him seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and entering in, they dwell there, and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first.*

The mean drift of this parable is to represent two important truths: *First*, that when a person is delivered from the bondage of sin by *baptism*, or the sacrament of *penance*, the devil is indefatigable, in seeking to replunge him into his former state; and the *second*, that the condition of a person thus relapsing, is worse than it was before his former deliverance from sin.

There is, however, a large difference between accidental falls, and a constant custom of relapsing. The former may justly be attributed to human weakness, but the latter deserves a much harsher censure; for it betrays an habitual bent of the heart, and is usually the fruit of a large degree of insensibility, attended with a supine neglect of the means necessary to subdue or weaken that inclination, which is the principal root of the relapses I speak of.

Now, it is of persons under those circumstances we must chiefly understand the words of Christ, saying, *that their last state is worse than the first.* Which may be fully made out, *first*, from the aggravations inseparable from such relapses; and *secondly*, from the mischiefs a sinner draws upon himself, by a custom of relapsing. I shall only speak of the first in this Entertainment.

The principal design of this discourse is to shew, that an habitual sinner becomes more criminal, and by consequence more injurious to God, every time he multiplies his relapses, than he was when he received last the benefit of absolution; I mean, however, if all other circumstances be equal. For if it is not to be questioned, but the sin or sins that were the subject of his preceding confession may be clogged with such circumstances, as far outweigh the aggravations of relapse. Neither can it be doubted, but there may be grains of allowance, for extraordinary and unforeseen occasions, or temptations more violent and lasting than usual. These being circumstances, which lessen the grievousness of any sin, and may serve as a counterpoise to such aggravations, as would otherwise weigh down the balance, and charge it with a heavier guilt.

I therefore speak of persons, who, without any notable change of circumstances, make a custom of returning to their vomit, and are in a kind of regular tract of confessing and relapsing, as if they only meant to wash themselves, to appear clean upon extraordinary days, and when those are over, to wallow again in the mire, and defile themselves as

much as ever. Now of these, I say, what Christ pronounced of the man, into whom the evil spirit re-entered after he had been once chased out, viz. *that their latter state is worse than their former*, and that by every relapse they contract a new addition of guilt, to what they stood charged with before the last pardon of their sins. The reason hereof is, *first*, because every relapse implies a greater contempt of God; *secondly*, because it gives a fresh aggravation to their former *treachery;* and *thirdly*, because it renders them guilty of a blacker *ingratitude*. I shall speak briefly of each.

First, then, as to the aggravation of contempt. To make myself rightly understood, I must first shew how every mortal sin implies a *contempt* of God, as a general circumstance inseparable from it. You must therefore know, that there is a *speculative* contempt, and a *practical* one. The former is in the *understanding* or *judgment;* the other in the heart or will. And though the latter be usually the effect of the former, they are not so inseparably connected, but the one may be without the other. *Speculative contempt* is nothing else but a mean idea conceived of any thing or person, and is always grounded upon some real or supposed effect. But *practical contempt* is an absolute and positive determination of the will, postponing or rejecting anything for the love of something else, which it prefers before it. And I call it a *practical contempt*, because it is the immediate result of our practical judgment, which, deliberating and comparing, determines the will to that choice.

Now it is manifest, no Christian, though ever so completely wicked in this practice, can ever be guilty of a speculative contempt of God; because, whoever but believes there is a God, must of necessity believe him to be infinitely perfect; and it is impossible to have a mean idea of what we believe to be infinite in all perfections; or condemn him in our speculative judgments, in whom we cannot so much as apprehend the least defect. Hence it comes to pass, that libertines themselves will sometimes speak with as much respect of Almighty God, as the most pious Christians; and they speak but what they really think; because their belief is sound, and their speculative judgment free from error. But their guilt consists in renouncing in fact, what they believe in speculation, and profess in words. Their faith is dead, and has no influence upon their actions. For though they have the knowledge of God, yet, as St. Paul

says, *they glorify him not, but vanish away in their thoughts.* So that notwithstanding the high and noble ideas they have of God's infinite perfections, which we may properly call a *speculative esteem,* they are guilty of a *practical contempt* of him in every sin they commit; because in every deliberate sin they effectually postpone and reject his friendship, for the love of some interest or pleasure, which they prefer before him.

This will appear evident, if we but consider the essential opposition *grace* has to *sin,* and their inconsistancy with each other. The word of God compares them to *light* and *darkness;* because as these can never be joined together in the same subject, so neither can *sin* and *grace* meet in the same soul. Grace destroys sin, and sin expels grace at the very moment it is consented to. So that upon the proposal of any temptation, the point in question in effect is this, whether the party concerned will resolve to prefer God's grace and friendship, or the pleasure of the sin to which he is tempted. For he cannot pretend to them both at once, but he must renounce either the one or the other. It is true, it cannot be doubted, but the most profligate sinner upon earth would rather choose to join them both together: For no man can become guilty of such an extravagant contempt of God, but that he would rather have his friendship, than be without it, if the keeping of it were to cost him nothing: but this being impossible, he must make a peremptory choice; and either *grace* or *sin* must preponderate, with an absolute exclusion of the other.

Hence it is observable, that before a mortal sin is consented to, there passes a kind of verbal debate within the soul, in which the understanding deliberates what to prefer, and what to postpone; conscience pleading on the one hand, and corrupt nature soliciting on the other; till the judgment, blinded with passion, and eager desire of a present satisfaction, determines the will to prefer what it ought to reject, and reject what it ought to prefer. And does not this preposterous and extravagant choice, made with full knowledge and deliberation, imply a manifest contempt of God? Does not a sinner, in preferring a present satisfaction, as good as declare, that whatever God's friendship may be worth in itself, yet, for his own part, he thinks it not worth his keeping it, with the trouble of denying himself that satisfaction? The case admits of no dispute. For

there is no argument like matter of fact. Nor can there be a more substantial proof of our contempt of anything, than our parting with it upon very easy terms, especially when it is done with full thought and reflection.

This therefore is the general circumstance of *contempt*, imbibed in every mortal sin. But this circumstance, as I have undertaken to shew, is very much aggravated in relapses, especially if they be frequent: *First*, because to do a thing often, shews a kind of settled determination to it; which, as it adds to the lustre and merit of virtue, so it must needs give an aggravation to sin, and all the circumstances that attend it. *Secondly*, Because in all offences, of what kind soever, even against men, the second transgression is always esteemed worse than the first, and the third worse than the second, and so forward; the latter being still worse than the former, and heightening the quality of the offence, as it increases the number.—Now, one of the reasons hereof doubtless is, because the repeating of an offence betrays a greater *contempt* of the party offended, and by consequence, the oftener it is repeated, the more avowed and barefaced is the contempt.—It therefore stands with reason, that the same rule should hold in reference to Almighty God, as in the case between man and man. For if he who makes a custom of affronting a man be reasonably supposed to have a greater contempt of him than he who does it but once or seldom, we cannot judge otherwise of a sinner, who makes a kind of practice of offending Almighty God, by renouncing his sacred friendship, as often as the devil and his passions offer him any thing in exchange for it.

This made Tertullian say, that a sinner, by returning to his vomit, revokes, as it were, his former repentance, and makes a kind of atonement for it to the devil. Not that he has any such thing in his *speculative* thoughts, but his actions imply it, and are a retraction, in *fact*, whereby he now disclaims God's friendship, dissolves the covenant made with him, and (as the scripture terms it) *makes a league with hell;* by virtue whereof, he subjects himself to the devil, and owns him for his lord and master.

Hence follows the aggravation of the second general circumstance of sin, viz. of *treachery*. The reason is, because every relapse is a new *breach of faith;* and a breach of faith, after many repeated engagements to the contrary, is

a treachery of a much fouler nature than without that circumstance. To make this clear, I must observe to you, that the *sacrament* of *penance* is a kind of second *baptism:* And as in baptism we make a second league and covenant with Almighty God, so when this is broke by mortal sin, we renew it again by virtue of the *sacrament* of *penance.* Now, in all leagues and covenants there are certain conditions agreed to on both sides. The conditions on the part of God, when we make our peace with him, are to forgive us our past sins, and restore us to his holy grace, with all the advantages belonging to it. The principal conditions on the part of the penitent, are to do penance for his sins, and offend God no more. Upon these terms he is again received into favour.

Hence it plainly follows, that every reconciliation is attended with a fresh engagement of fidelity on the part of the penitent; and that as often as he has recourse to the sacrament of penance, so often he renews his covenant with God, and gives him fresh assurance of fidelity to him for the future. As for instance, he who has been pardoned twenty times, lies under the obligation of twenty several contracts or engagements; and every one of these, besides his first baptismal vows, stands good for ever, and obliges him to a perpetual fidelity; because they are not made for a limited time, but for life; nor does a penitent promise not to sin again for a week, month, or year, but never to offend God any more.

Now, from all these promises, it manifestly follows, that every relapse is a breach of all the covenants that have ever passed between Almighty God and the sinner; as being directly contrary to the conditions stipulated, and agreed upon in every one of them, from the first to the last: And by consequence, the last relapse cannot but imply a higher degree of *perfidiousness* than any of the former; because it always is a violation of one solemn league, more than the preceding one, and breaks at once through all the sacred ties of fidelity, that have ever engaged him to God, throughout the whole course of his life.

Thus, then, you see how the general circumstance of *treachery* is aggravated by every relapse; and the same must be said of that of *ingratitude;* which, as it is implied in every sin, so it receives an aggravation from every relapse we become guilty of, especially after having obtained

from God's pure mercy the full discharge and pardon of our former sins. This is evident, because the more and greater blessings we receive from the infinite bounty of God, the more we are indebted to him; and the more we are indebted to him the more ungrateful we are in offending him. Now of all blessings in this life, the pardon of our sins is one of the highest value; because it delivers us from the power and slavery of the devil, restores us to the life of grace, and puts us again into full possession of the title we had forfeited to eternal bliss.

Oh, what treasures are these! What inestimable blessings! and how great then is the bounty and mercy that bestows them: nothing truly can equal it in any degree, but the ingratitude of a sinner, who makes a custom of abusing the author of it. A subject that rebels against his sovereign, after he has been pardoned by him though but once or twice, for the same crime, is looked upon as a monster of ingratitude, and detested as such by all men of worth and honour. What name then can we find to express the ingratitude a sinner is guilty of, who sticks not to rebel against Almighty God, after the many reiterated pardons obtained of him, besides other numberless blessings over and above? But though no words can express the nature of his crime, the comparison may at least help us to form some idea of it; and plainly shews, that, though the vice of ingratitude be one of the basest qualities, even between man and man, yet the ingratitude of a sinner, returning again to his vomit, after he has been so often the object of God's mercy, has something of foulness in it, which infinitely surpasses whatever can be practised in that kind, by one man in relation to another.

I shall now conclude with drawing this one consequence, from the consideration that I have enlarged upon, viz. that since the frequent relapses of habitual sinners are so extremely injurious to the divine majesty and goodness, as I have justly represented them to be, it is no wonder they should often terminate, either in a *final impenitence*, or at the best, in a *death-bed repentance*, which is the last and worst chance a sinner can have for his soul. That the matter of fact is so, is but too manifest from experience; and, in effect, is but what the Holy Ghost has menaced by the mouth of St. Paul, who writes thus to the Galatians, chap. vi. *Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. For he that*

soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption. But he that soweth in the spirit, of the spirit shall reap life everlasting. This doctrine of St. Paul is grounded on this undoubted maxim in morality, viz. that God usually covers the effects, both of his judgments and mercies, under the operation of natural causes. Now, there is almost as natural a connection between the manner of men's lives, and their deaths, as there is between the nature of any *seed*, and its *fruit*. A long series of good works is the natural seed of a happy death; and a long practice of vice tends as naturally to an unhappy one. *What things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap.*

But though there were no natural connection between them, it is enough that God has promised the one, as the proper reward of virtue, and threatened the other as the just punishment of sin. He promises incomprehensible rewards to spur us on to virtue, and he threatens endless evils to deter us from sin: and, he will most certainly make good his promises, by crowning a good life with a happy death; so nothing but a groundless and insupportable presumption can make men flatter themselves, that the practice of vice will terminate in the reward of virtue; and that God, who is faithful to his word, will favour those with the *death of the just*, who have led the lives, and walked in the paths of the wicked.

TWENTY-FOURTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE MISCHIEFS A SINNER DRAWS ON HIMSELF BY A CUSTOM OF RELAPSES.

And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. Luke xi. 26.

The aggravations inseparable from a custom of relapses, has been fully demonstrated in my last discourse, wherein I have shewed plainly, that *the last state of a relapsing sinner is worse than the first;* which, however is not only true in relation to Almighty God, whose displeasure he incurs more grievously than before; but also in relation to his own soul, whose evils are gradually increased by it; as will appear from the mischiefs he draws on himself by every relapse, as shall be shewn in this Entertainment.

The first mischief that attends a custom of relapsing, is a

continual uneasiness, and disquiet of conscience. Experience suffices to convince us, how great an evil this is; I mean, to one who is not utterly hardened in sin: for as the greatest blessing in this life is an easy mind, grounded upon a good conscience, so there can be no real happiness without it. The repose of a good conscience is as a *continual feast*, and the torment of a troubled one, labouring under the guilt of mortal sin is, to the soul, much what the rack is to the body. It allows her no rest, disquiets her night and day, and sours all the pleasures of life: nay, let a man be otherwise ever so happy, and enjoy all the advantages of health, wealth, friends, or anything the world can bestow upon him, he is effectually miserable, under the stings and lashes of a bad conscience.

The heathens themselves were so sensible of this truth, that they looked upon the torment of a guilty conscience as one of the heaviest punishments in this world; and therefore represented it figuratively, by things of which they had the greatest horror, as the gnawings of vipers, the haunting of frightful spectres, the lashes of the furies, and the like.

Now, if this be the inseparable punishment of sin in general, at least to a soul not utterly lost to all sense of God and another world, it is, doubtless, much worse in the case of relapses; because, as the guilt is greater, so the sting that follows it must also be sharper, and the party concerned more disquieted and uneasy under it. And indeed, the reasons he has to be uneasy under it are but too many, and too well grounded. First, the melancholy reflection of having, for a momentary pleasure, lost that solid peace of mind he enjoyed before, frets and galls him to the very quick: then the thought of having, by his last treason and ingratitude, provoked God's anger more than ever, disturbs him with the terror of his judgments. To this is added, the confusion he is under of again confessing his sins, which the devil's malice often heightens to an excessive degree, either to throw him into some desperate course, or at least to keep him in his power, by the shame of laying open the fresh ulcer of his soul, and imploring again the mercy he has so lately abused.

Add to this, the mortifying thought that he is now to begin again, as having by his relapse, lost all the fruit of his past labours, and not only forfeited the favour and friendship of Almighty God, but the merits of all the good works

he has ever practised, which are now cancelled, and of no more benefit to him, than if they had never been performed. This is the general doctrine of divines, grounded upon the word of God, who speaks thus by the mouth of Ezekiel; *If the just man* (says he) *shall turn away from his justice, to return to his former iniquity, I will forget all the good he has done.* And the wise man says upon this subject, *What does it avail a man, who has touched a dead body, to have washed himself, if he again defiles himself, and touches it?*

These are some reasons of that uneasiness and disquiet of a conscience, which a custom of relapsing brings with it. But I take the principal one to be the just ground it gives of suspecting the validity of preceding confessions: for, though I have no reason to think myself inclined to represent things worse than they really are, yet I cannot without flattery, assure relapsing sinners, that they need not trouble themselves about the validity of their past confessions, unless they can first assure me, that to the best of their knowledge, whenever they confessed their sins, they always resolved seriously, both to avoid the occasions of their relapses, and use serious endeavours to overcome the difficulties they labour under; for whoever is not conscious to himself of ever having failed in either of those two points, (supposing always, that no fraud has been used in his confessions) may, notwithstanding his relapses, be falsely advised not to be over solicitous about what is past, but rather take care of what is to come, by often repeating the same good purposes, and doing his best endeavours to put them faithfully in practice.

But if, on the contrary, any one's conscience reproaches him, that he either has not always seriously resolved to avoid the occasions of sin, or has not proposed to take due measures for the overcoming of his habits, such an one has all the reason in the world to be very uneasy about the validity of his past confessions; and to tell him otherwise, would be to flatter him into a false security, and encourage him to go on quietly in the way of perdition: the reason is plain, because *contrition*, which is an essential part of *penance*, and implies a serious purpose of amendment, as well as sorrow for sins past, is defective without the two forementioned resolutions; and the defect of any one essential part suffices to make the whole confession null. I add,

moreover, that when relapsing grows into a habit or custom, there is generally ground enough to suspect, that some defect in the repentance is the real occasion of it; and it is to be feared, that whoever is under this unhappy circumstance, if he will but look back into the method of his past confessions, and examine them impartially, will, for the most part, discover defects enough to find himself under a necessity of being as solicitous to make good what is past, as careful to avoid all causes of the like for the future.

But there remains yet another mischief inseparable from a custom of relapsing, viz. that the habit of it, and by consequence the difficulty of amendment, is usually increased by every relapse. Now this increase of difficulty proceeds from several causes: First, From the withdrawing of the divine Spirit; who as he pours himself liberally on those that are careful to preserve his holy grace, enlightening their understanding, strengthening their wills, inflaming their affections, and visiting them with a thousand pious motions and inspirations; so he withdraws himself with all these favours, from those who know not how to set a true value upon this precious treasure, but are ready to part with it for every sinful pleasure that courts their inclinations: from these, I say, he withdraws himself, by the same steps and degrees as they depart from the way of God's commandments; and forbears communicating these extraordinary lights and special graces, without which the ordinary one's are, for the most part, rendered fruitless, through the corruption of their hearts, caused by the strong inclination to sin on the one hand, and the habit they have contracted of resisting God's inspirations on the other.

Whence follows, of course, the second cause that increases the difficulty of their return to God; to wit, the new addition of power the devil gets over them by every sin they relapse into: for since every act of mortal sin banishes God from the soul, and puts the devil in possession of it; because there is no middle or vacancy in the soul, but either God or Satan must be master of it; it follows, that the frequency of such acts, as it sets a sinner at a great distance from God, and the influences of his holy grace, so, at the same time, it gives the devil an opportunity to fortify himself more strongly; the consequence whereof can be no other than the increasing still more and more, the difficulty of his return to God. And since one relapse naturally draws on

another, the frequent multiplying of them cannot but at length establish the dominion of the devil over him, in such a manner, that it will become at length the work of nothing less than a very extraordinary grace to rescue him out of his power.

This leads me to a third cause, that renders the recovery of a relapsing sinner still more and more difficult, to wit, the natural increase and growth of habits by a frequency of their acts. This is evident from experience, even in the progress of virtuous habits, or such as are indifferent in themselves; for the oftener we repeat their acts, the deeper they take root; and there is no way of attaining to a proficiency in any of them but by practice, that is, a frequent repetition of their proper acts. But vicious habits have a great advantage over these, and are of a much quicker growth; because corrupt nature is, as it were, their proper and natural soil: they are like weeds that grow wild, and come up of themselves: Nay, there even needs a great deal of care and pains to destroy them: but if, instead of this, we also cultivate and cherish them, if the soil be improved and prepared for them, over and above, we may easily guess how quick they will grow upon us.

However, thus far is certain, that every time we yield to any vicious habit, we become proner to yield to it again; we make nature more pliable to all its impressions; we give a new strength to it, and make it sink deeper than before. Our passions are like a head-strong mob, the more we gratify them in their unreasonable demands, the more we encourage them to rebel; and the only way to bring them to terms of reason, is to keep them under a severe discipline. Was there ever any man subject to the tyranny of any passion but must own, that the beginning of his misfortune was dated from the first time he yielded to it? And that the gradual increase of its power over him was also wholly owing to the very same cause; which, as often as it was repeated, still produced the same effect, and gave a new addition of strength to the growing evil? Must he not own, that whenever he indulged that passion, he found it more rebellious afterwards? And when he flattered himself he would but gratify it for the present, he only set it a craving more eagerly, and cut out work for a more difficult combat than before?

It is therefore evident, that the tyranny of sin increasing

with sinning, and that the oftener we yield the more we desire to yield, and become less able to resist: nay, we may yield so long, till it becomes in a manner natural, and our power of resisting so weak, that we are scarce sensible that we have any. I should be afraid to say this, had I not St. Austin's authority for it, whose words upon this subject are quoted by every body. *Ex voluntate perversa facta est libido, et dum servitur libidini facta est consuetudo; et dum consuetudini non resistitur, facta est necessitas.* Here we have all the principal steps and degrees of a growing habit, described by this saint. His words may be translated thus: *The will, not governed, turns to an eager desire of sin, and by our gratifying this desire, it is formed into a habit, and a habit not resisted becomes a necessity.* St. Isidore expresses the same in these terms: *Actio consuetudinem parit, consuetudo necessitatem, necessitas mortem,* that is to say, *Acts produce a habit, a habit begets a necessity, and necessity terminates in death,* meaning the eternal death of the soul.

It is true, I cannot but think that both these fathers are to be understood in a qualified sense, and not of an *absolute* and *irresistible necessity.* For where there is no power to resist, there can be no liberty, and without liberty there is no sin, because sin is a *free and voluntary transgression* against the law of God. However, their words import a violent bent and proneness of nature, as seems to approach very near to an irresistible necessity in all its *effects.* And this is what the scripture calls the *servitude* or *slavery* of sin. Because, as a slave is at his master's beck, to obey all his orders, though ever so extravagant; so a person, under these unhappy circumstances, is so perfectly subject to the tyranny of his prevailing passion, that he scarce knows what it is to resist, and seems rather hurried on, or thrust forward, like an engine, than to act freely, when objects, which are agreeable to that inclination, and accustomed to prevail upon it, present themselves.

Oh, how dangerous and deplorable is the state of a sinner reduced to such a servitude! It is true, his condition is not desperate, because, as St. Austin says, *no wound is incurable to an omnipotent physician;* and as long as there is life, there is hope. Nay he is bound to do all he can to work himself out of it; particularly by an humble and hearty prayer, by reading pious books, mortifying his senses,

and avoiding all occasions of the sin he is inclined to.—However, we cannot but consider him as one reduced to a most dangerous state. And therefore, since every sin we commit brings us still nearer and nearer to this unhappy state, because, by every sin the power of sin is increased, and the power of resisting is diminished; it follows evidently that by every relapse, the recovery of a sinner becomes more difficult than it was before, and the oftener he falls, the harder it is for him to rise again. And so his difficulties go on increasing, till by multiplying relapses, he brings himself to the condition I have described, which, as St. Isidore tells us, usually *terminates in death*, by closing all up, with the last fruits of sin in this life, I mean *despair* and *final impenitence*.

Thus we see the nature and dangerous consequences of relapses; that is, the injury they do to God on the one hand, and the mischiefs they bring with them on the other. In my last discourse, I laid before you the barefaced *contempt* of God, the *treachery* and *ingratitude* which those, who continue in the practice of them, are guilty of. But since it usually happens, that persons accustomed to sin, are but little affected with considerations of this nature, self-interest ought at least to open their eyes, and make them sensible of the unhappy state they live in: For what content and satisfaction can they enjoy? What ease can they have under the weight, and continual reproaches of a guilty conscience? Are not their very pleasures embittered by it? Have they any thing to comfort them in their afflictions? Then again, what fears and agonies do they suffer? Are they not disturbed with every danger that threatens them? Nay, often with the mere imagination of it? Is not the very thought of death, as bitter almost as death itself, with the apprehension of their being surprised by it, in a state in which they know themselves wholly unprovided.

These certainly are the usual attendants, this is the daily portion of a guilty conscience. And truly nothing is a greater evidence of the power of sin, than that all the miseries it makes men suffer, even in this life, are not sufficient to move them to a generous resolution to throw off its yoke. But will they not consider, that the longer they continue subject to it, that they more increase their slavery? Will they not consider, that every sin they com-

mit, is the addition of a new and strong link to the chain that holds them in bondage; and that by adding sin to sin, they may at length strengthen their fetters to such a degree, as to put it in a great measure out of their power to break loose from them?

I say, *in a great measure*, to express the difficulty of it. For though it be true that a sinner cannot absolutely lose the power of returning to God, during the course of this life; yet this power may, by long custom of sinning be so cramped and weakened, and his vicious habits so strengthened, that without an extraordinary grace to enable him, which he has no reason to presume upon, he will never have the courage and resolution to break through all the difficulties into which he has thrown himself; and experience will too late convince him, that it is much easier to conquer a passion in the beginning, than even to struggle heartily with it, when it is once fortified by habit and custom.

I only wish the experiment may never be tried; and conclude with our Saviour's advice to the cripple cured by him, *Sin now no more, lest something worse befal thee.*

TWENTY-FIFTH ENTERTAINMENT.

OF VENIAL SINS.

He that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little. Eccl. xix. 1.

Having in the foregoing discourses, set forth the enormity of mortal sin, and the danger of frequent relapses into it; the order of my subject now calls upon to propose some general means to prevent this evil. The first of these, and which appears the most natural, is to be solicitous to avoid, not only mortal sin itself, but every thing that borders upon it, and the very remotest steps towards it. For, as the greatest virtue is sometimes owing for its first rise and progress to very small beginnings, so is it also with vice. Hence one false step in the beginning has often drawn after it a long train of sinful disorders, and the blackest crimes may be ushered in by the smallest failings. Nay, the natural course of things seems to require that it should be so. For vice has its degrees to go through as well as virtue; the soul must be prepared, before she can familiarise herself

with it: and it is as unnatural for a man to fall from virtue to the depth of vice, as it is for water that is boiling hot, to pass to the greatest degree of coldness, without being first lukewarm.

For this reason, as there is no degree of virtue so small, but ought to be cultivated and cherished, because it may be gradually improved; so is there no sin so inconsiderable, but what we ought to be jealous of, and carefully put a stop to in the beginning; because if it be neglected, it may prove to be of dangerous consequence, and become the seed of mortal sin: For how small soever it may seem in itself, it prepares the way for greater ones, and opens a breach for the devil to enter at, and make himself master of the soul, as we are expressly forewarned by the Holy Ghost, assuring us, that *he that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little.* And by Christ also, who tells us, *that whoever is unfaithful in small things, is also unfaithful in great ones.*

You plainly see, I speak not of the danger of barely committing, but of *contemning* or *neglecting* venial sins. For there is a large difference between these two: because to be surprised into them, is an effect of human weakness, even in the most pious Christians; but to *contemn* them, is not only to commit them with full knowledge and deliberation, but to multiply them one after another, without any farther care or concern to atone for them, or give a check to their growth, by a speedy repentance. Now this contempt or neglect of venial sins, is so great a disposition to mortal, that whoever is guilty of the one, seldom stops long without falling into the other, as I shall endeavour to shew in this Entertainment.

The first reason why a contempt of venial sin disposes to mortal, is grounded upon the natural connexion the one has with the other. This reason comprehends not all venial sins, with relation to mortal sins in general, but only such venial and mortal sins as are within the same species, or proceed from the same root, and only differ in their several respective degrees. Now the connexion between these venial and mortal sins is such, that he who makes a little account of the one, will not long avoid being drawn or surprised into the other. For, it is with the distempers of the soul, as with those of the body: Many have paid dear for having neglected a slight indisposition, which, if care

had been taken at first, would have gone off without farther consequence; but being neglected, brought them at last to their grave. The scratch of a pin is but a trivial wound, yet if you let it fester or turn to a gangrene, it may cost you your life. In like manner, though a venial sin be but a slight indispositon, or a small wound of the soul, as I may call it; yet if through want of timely care, you prevent not its growth, it may easily become mortal, and deprive you of your spiritual life.

Thus he that accustoms himself to pilfering thefts, will not be long before he becomes guilty of great ones. Thus it also often comes to pass, that the first motions of anger or impatience if not checked immediately, break out soon after into a violent storm, and many times into murmurs and blasphemies against God. Thus again a customary neglect or coldness in our devotions, paves the way to libertinism. Thus, finally, a small misunderstanding, not immediately made up, sours upon the heart, and turns into implacable rancour; a light suspicion deliberately entertained, is by degrees improved into a consummate rash judgment; an immoderate liberty of discoursing of our neighbour's imperfections, draws on insensibly downright detracting; and indiscreet familiarity smooths the way to criminal immodesties; and so forth, in innumerable other cases, in which venial sins have so great an affinity with mortal, that they are but, as it were, an easy step to it: Nor would this foul guest be able to get admittance into the heart, were it not introduced by failings of a less frightful aspect.

This leads me to a short digression, relating to the *immediate occasions* of mortal sin, which all are indispensably bound to shun. By *immediate occasions*, I mean those which seldom or never fail of being followed by, and are but, as it were, one single remove from a mortal sin, to which they dispose either of their own nature, or by reason of the peculiar weakness of a temper easily wrought upon. All then, I say, are bound in conscience to shun occasions of this nature to the utmost of their power. The reason whereof is manifest, because their connexion with mortal sin is so great, that whoever loves the one, cannot reasonably be supposed to hate the other; as he who will needs be handling pitch, when he can avoid it, may be presumed to be no friend to cleanliness. So that the dan-

ger here threatens not barely at a distance, as in the venial sins I have hitherto spoken of, but brings immediate death to the soul, and verifies the saying of Solomon, that *he who loves danger shall perish in it.* Whence it plainly follows, that whoever is concerned in any occasion of this nature, and approaches the sacred tribunal, without a firm purpose to separate himself from it, is guilty of sacrilege; his confession being a mere mockery, and serving only to render more criminal, instead of reconciling him to God; since his heart keeps a secret correspondence with his enemy, though his tongue makes ever so many protestations to the contrary.

But to return to the point in question: the second reason why a contempt of venial sin disposes to mortal, is because committing them frequently, (I mean with deliber-) ation) makes sinning grow familiar to us; it accustoms us to have a kind of disregard to God's holy law, and hardens us insensibly against the fear of transgressing; which being one of the strongest fences against sin, when this fence is broken down, a free passage is opened for all sorts of sin to enter in upon us.

The force of this reason will appear the better, if we consider that the first and chief care of those, who are charged with the education of children, is to ground them well with the fear of God, and inspire them with a great horror of sin; this being the most solid foundation of virtue, and best security of vice. Now, when a person is thus principled, and the fear of God has taken deep root in the soul: the first proposal of a mortal sin is apt to startle him as much, as if you should shew him a deep precipice, and bid him throw himself headlong into it. The very thought of it affects him with horror, and serves only to alarm him into a watchfulness and concern answerable to the greatness of the danger that threatens him.

Nor is the devil ignorant of this great secret. He is too great a master in the mystery of iniquity, and the art of training souls up to it, not to know that to push them all at once to the brink of the precipice, or tempt them to mortal sin at the very first suggestion, is so far from promoting, that it is the direct way to obstruct and frustrate his malicious designs: He knows the net must be spread at a distance, and the danger kept out of sight; he knows a tender conscience must be nicely managed, and weaned by de-

grees from the shame and fear of sin, in which it was nursed, before it can be worked up to a pitch of boldness, to venture upon offending God mortally: And, the only sure way he has to effect this, is to lead men on gently, from step to step, from one degree of sin to another, till he brings them at last so far, as to make little or no account of deliberate venial sins. For, when this difficulty is once well got over, when offending God with full deliberation, though but in small things, is once become familiar and easy, it is manifest the devil has then got over a very considerable part of his work; because, by this means, the greatest obstacle to mortal sin, I mean the *fear of God*, and a certain tenderness of conscience, are then, though not wholly taken away, at least removed in a very great measure; and what remains to be done is little more than leading an enemy against a town already well disposed, and prepared to receive him. And, therefore, the devil chooses mostly this slow and gradual method of corrupting innocent souls, and bringing them under the yoke and slavery of sin; a long experience having sufficiently evinced the infallible truth of this divine oracle, viz. *that he that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little.*

To explain myself by some familiar instance; when, for example, the devil intends to draw a person from his ordinary duties or devotions, in order to draw him insensibly into an irregular course of life, the first step he makes is to bring him to a negligent performance of them: His next endeavour is to prevail at least, so far upon him, as to make him put them off to some unusual or unseasonable hour: He proposes not as yet an absolute omission of them, because he finds him not disposed to swallow this bait: besides he knows the absolute omitting of certain duties is but a natural and easy sequel to our putting them off from time to time, and will soon follow of course. Some hindrance, for example, wholly unforeseen, intervenes at the time designed. The party finds himself engaged in company which he cannot well leave: It is true, he has at first some squeamishness of conscience to omit them; but it cannot be helped: Necessity has no law. This happens several times. The scruple he had at first wears off by degrees; he begins to be habituated to it; at length, whether any hindrance happens or not, he wholly lays aside the devotions he formerly used to practise. The omitting of

one draws on insensibly the omitting of another; because the ground of it, which is a tenderness of conscience, and a zeal for the service of God, is weakened by it: And thus he falls, not all at once, but by certain easy steps and degrees into a negligent and slothful course of life, which, as experience convinces, seldom fails to banish from the heart the fear of God, and engage persons in irregular ways, the usual consequences whereof are habits of mortal sin. So that you see, a small neglect, not corrected in time, proves often to be the first link of a long chain of sin, which at last drags the soul to everlasting perdition.

Nay, we may confidently say of persons that have been virtuously educated in their youth, and early grounded in the fear of God, that the devil, with all his power and malice, would never be able to fasten considerably upon them, did he not get his first hold by sins, which in appearance, are inconsiderable, and of no consequence, whereas thousands of this sort have been drawn into the most scandalous and wicked courses, by the very steps I have marked out. How many have turned mere sots, who at first detested the vice of drunkenness, and even had a natural aversion to it; but engaging themselves unwarily in company, were drawn in by degrees from sipping to drinking; and from smaller excesses to greater, till having served this sort of apprenticeship, as I may call it, for some time, they become at last complete masters of the trade, and not only follow it themselves, but help to train up others in it? How many again have only by beginning with mock-oaths, run insensibly into the vice of cursing and swearing, though at their first coming into the world they had the greatest hatred to it? Finally, how many innocent souls have been trepanned this way into all the exravagancies of a disorderly life, who at first would have sooner thrown themselves into the jaws of a bear or lion, than consented to the sins they afterwards committed, without blushing or remorse?

Nay, do we not see daily examples of this nature? A young man enters into the world with inclinations to virtue, and principles of religion to support it, but being now master of a plentiful fortune, the devil puts it into his head that devotion is not a gentleman-like virtue: that regular hours are only fit for colleges and cloisters; and that to be advised by friends or parents is to be treated like a child,

and kept under tutelage. Here is yet no proposal of any vice: The devil is only busy in disarming his virtue, and he certainly takes the fittest time to succeed in his malicious design; because a young man never stands more in need of keeping up those fences, I mean devotion, regularity, and a docile temper, to preserve the good fruits of his education, than at the critical time of his first entrance into the world; it being evident, from experience, that the measures a person takes at that time, determine usually his life for ever after, and have a considerable influence upon his happiness or unhappiness, both in this world and the next. So that if he begins then to lay aside the practice of a regular and uniform devotion; if he lives by chance and humours, instead of rule and method; if he withdraws himself from the direction and charitable advice of friends, for fear of incommoding his inclinations; we may readily pronounce upon him, that he is in a dangerous way; and though he be not yet guilty of criminal excesses, they will soon follow; the fences are already broken down, the passage is clear, and the world and the flesh may enter in at leisure.

Hence it is, that as the devil has, by long experience found this gradual method of corrupting innocent souls to be the most successful, so he certainly inspires those ministers of iniquity, who serve under him in this wicked trade, to employ the same artifice in pursuing their designs. What man has ever had the imprudence to make a barefaced criminal proposal to a virtuous woman at the first interview? He knows it will be rejected with horror and indignation, unless she can first be prevailed upon to lay aside some part, at least, of that modest behaviour, which is the best guard as well as ornament of her sex, and keeps men in respect. For as long as she keeps up the nice rules of modesty, and neither encourages nor suffers any of those liberties or addresses, by which ill-designing men commonly lay their snares at a distance, her virtue is as safe as a citadel, to which no army can make its approaches. But if those freedoms be tolerated, or allowed of, her virtue may be in danger; since libertines, who have no other aim than to corrupt it, will be encouraged by it to redouble their endeavours to draw her insensibly into more criminal compliance.

Wherefore, to conclude this discourse, it highly concerns

all those whom God has hitherto preserved from vice, to take timely warning by the falls of so many other miserable souls, who stood once as fair for Heaven as themselves, and might have easily maintained their ground had they but been careful not to give the devil an advantage over them by putting themselves within his reach, when they ought to have kept him at a distance, which would have certainly secured them against his temptation: For the condition of a man's soul in this world is much the same with that of a town besieged by any enemy: As long as the enemy is bravely repulsed from the out-works, a town is in no danger of being taken; but when he has once lodged himself in the ditch, or counter-scarp, the town itself will be soon forced to surrender. Just so it is with man's soul; as long as we keep the devil at a distance, and by *watchfulness* and *assiduity in prayer*, which are, as it were, the out-works that cover us against him, we hinder him from gaining ground or approaching near us: we are out of danger of being overcome by him. But if we once let him make himself master of those out-works, though we seemingly resolve to stop him there, we shall soon see ourselves deceived, and experience, to our own sad cost, that it is much easier to keep our enemy quite out than to dislodge him, when he has once got footing. So that the true secret to avoid mortal sin, is to be tender of committing any wilful venial one, and not to slight them because they are little: *for he that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little.*

TWENTY-SIXTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater. Luke xvi. 10.

Besides the two reasons already given, that venial sins dispose to mortal, there is a third of great weight, viz. the *diminution of grace*, caused by every wilful and deliberate venial sin, which shall be the subject of this Entertainment.

That every wilful and deliberate venial sin cause a diminution of *charity*, and by consequence of *grace*, is the doctrine of all spiritual writers; who, as they all agree that no collection or number of venial sins, how great soever,

can of itself utterly extinguish *charity :* so they are no less unanimous in assuring us, that every deliberate venial sin *cools its fervour* in some degree, weakens the power of grace, and renders the soul less vigorous and active in resisting the assaults of corrupt nature : All which facilitates of course the way to mortal sin, and disposes the will to it, in the same degree or measure, as it takes away from the strength that is to oppose it.

To give you a clear knowledge of this truth, it will be necessary to explain the principle on which it is grounded. You must therefore observe, that in every person, justified by *baptism,* or the sacrament of *penance,* there are two opposite roots, viz. *grace* and *corrupt nature.* St. Austin calls them *charity* and *concupiscence ;* because they only differ from *grace* and *corrupt nature,* as natural properties from the essence they flow from : For as *charity* flows from *habitual grace,* and is inseparably connected with it, so is *concupiscence* no less the immediate effect and inseparable attendant of *corrupt nature. Charity,* as it is here taken by St. Austin, is the *love of God above all things ;* and by *concupiscence* is meant its opposite love, viz. *self-love,* or the *irregular love of ourselves,* or of any *creature in order to ourselves.*

Now, all deliberate actions or desires (I mean such as are *sinful* or *meritorious)* have their growth from one of these two roots. *Charity* is the root of all meritorious, and *concupiscence* the source of all sinful actions and desires : And these two opposite roots or qualities act upon each other in the soul, much after the same manner as two contrary humours do in the body. They are always in dispute and strife about the mastery over the heart, and whatever side prevails, it either destroys or subdues, or at least weakens the other in some degree ; but with this difference, that *charity,* which is the effect of *habitual grace,* may not only be weakened, but utterly extinguished and destroyed by the prevailing power of *concupiscence :* whereas *concupiscence,* though it may be mortified and subdued, can never be wholly exterminated in this mortal life. And the reason of this difference is, because *charity* goes and comes of course with *habitual grace,* from whence it flows ; which being a free gift of God, is wholly foreign to our nature, and no part of our own stock ; and though of itself it be a subsisting and permanent quality, and very different from

those *passing graces* which move us to action, yet it may easily be lost, and is effectually forfeited by every act of the will consenting to mortal sin. But *concupiscence* is born and bred within us, and so closely interwoven with our nature, that though *grace* may restrain it, and tie it up from doing us mischief, nothing but death can destroy it.

However, it plainly follows hence, that both *charity* and *concupiscence* have their several degrees of increase and abatement, which ever rise or fall in proportion as *charity* is more or less vigorous and active in combating against the inclination of corrupt nature. When *charity* exerts itself vigorously in opposing the irregular desires of *concupiscence*, it gets ground at every step; because by every act it produces or commands, (as divines speak) it merits an increase of grace; whereby it becomes still more active, and better able to resist the assaults of its enemy. But when *charity* grows languid and inactive, it runs insensibly to decay, which, if timely care be not taken to prevent it, must unavoidably terminate in utter destruction, because *concupiscence*, which never lies idle, gets ground in the mean time; and it is the nature of this restless evil never to leave off pursuing its course till it becomes absolute mistress of the heart, which must unavoidably follow sooner or later, if *grace* and *charity*, which alone can restrain it, continue to lose ground by our frequently gratifying corrupt nature, though but in small things: for though the *love of God* be not thus destroyed all at once; yet, like a body labouring under a lingering distemper, or a decay of its vital spirits, it falls away insensibly, till at last it becomes so weak and feeble, that we may give it for lost at the first violent temptation that assaults it. And thus it is that by gradual diminution of *charity*, or the *love of God*, caused by repeated venial sins, *passion* becomes at length too strong for *reason*, the *flesh* triumphs over the *spirit*, and *charity* is destroyed by *concupiscence*, the effect whereof is the death of the soul.

It is true this way of destroying the life of the soul is not so quick as when it is done at one mortal blow; but it is no less sure; and the mischief the soul receives is in effect the same, whether she be starved out by degrees, or overcome by one brisk assault. This seems exactly conformable to St. Austin's doctrine in his 118th epistle, where he compares venial sins to drops of water, which, by their

number, sink at length a ship. His words are these: *If a ship be lost, what matter is it whether she be swallowed all at once, or gradually sunk by many drops of water entering at a leak, and neglected to be pumped out?* For if the devil can but rob us of God's grace, it equally serves his turn, whether he rifles us all at once, or by small parcels. Nay, as a modern author observes ingeniously, the smallest sins are often the greatest stratagems; because we are but seldom on our guard against them, neither are we much affected with the mischief they do us. We regard them as inconsiderable evils, not reflecting that their poison, though it be not mortal in itself, may prove so in its consequence.

Nay, to persons strongly inclined to sin, it is morally impossible it should be otherwise, because every deliberate venial sin they commit is still a weakening of their spiritual strength, and deprives them of some part of that portion of grace which should support them in the day of battle. Who is there that ever fell into mortal sin, but if he looks back, and traces his misfortune to its source, will not find that his neglect of lesser failings was the first step to it? *The greatest crimes* (says St. Bernard) *have their beginning from the smallest sins; for no man becomes completely wicked on a sudden.* It is always either some neglect of duty, or coldness in our devotions, or want of guard upon our senses, or some immoderate dissipation of the mind, or vanity of the heart, that gives the first occasion to the greatest falls. For though these seem to be all trespasses of little or no consequence, and would be so in reality, if care were immediately taken to apply their proper remedies and hinder the poison from spreading farther; yet when, on the contrary, they are neglected, when we make little account of them, and take no care to put a stop to their farther progress, the case is quite otherwise. For then every venial sin we commit helps to embezzle some part of our stock of grace, which is the strength of our souls, and renders us less able to resist the power of concupiscence. Every venial sin lays us then more and more open, and widens the breach for our enemy to enter at, who, we may be sure, neglects not to take us at this disadvantage, and improve the opportunity we give him, by thus weakening and disarming ourselves; so that though venial sins cannot of themselves cause the death of the soul, yet they are always a remote disposition to it; and if neglected

and multiplied, waste our spiritual strength, and dispirit our souls to such a degree, that under this weak and languishing condition, it becomes very difficult to preserve the life of grace for any long time.

I shall now conclude, with some directions particularly proper for those, who are already engaged in any habit of mortal sin: for the very same method, which, if it had been used in due time, would have preserved them from falling into that unhappy state, is now the only effectual expedient to draw them out of it. They fell into it by degrees; for no man plunges himself into vice all at once. Many repeated falls, and those usually occasioned by the same previous failings, brought them into the habit of sinning; and they have no other way left to get out of it, than by carefully avoiding those occasions, and lesser failings, which were the preparatory steps as well to their first fall as the following ones, which became the links of that chain which has fettered them up, and holds them in the bondage of sin. For though the relapses of habitual sinners come usually on much quicker than their first fall, and as the habits get strength, return quicker upon them, yet they are always gradual in some measure, and ushered in by sins of a lesser note, the avoiding of which is the only thing that will certainly secure them.

First, then, it behoves them to use their utmost endeavours to avoid all wilful and deliberate venial sins, of what kind soever, though they seem to have no natural connection with the mortal sin to which they were inclined; whereof I have already given the reason, to wit, because every venial sin, of what kind soever it be, causing a diminution of grace, is by consequence a weakening of that spiritual strength, which their great weakness and proneness to sin stands highly in need of, to support them against the temptations of the devil.

Whence it also follows, that any wilful neglect or omission of their usual devotions, may be of ill consequence to them; because prayer, being one of the principal means to obtain God's grace, which alone can support them, a neglect of it must needs deprive them, at least in some part, of this necessary and powerful succour. And though the casual omission of the duty of prayer may be no great matter in itself, it is so to one that stands in need of a special and extraordinary grace to keep him from falling; and this is

chiefly to be obtained by an extraordinary exactness in every duty, since our Saviour has declared, *that he who is faithful in small things, shall be so in great ones;* because his constant fidelity in small things will be rewarded with so plentiful a succour from Heaven, as will strengthen him, even against the most violent assaults of his enemy.

Now, if it be so necessary, for the recovery of an habitual sinner, to avoid even such wilful and deliberate venial sins as have no natural connection with the prevailing habit, it concerns him certainly much more to avoid all such, as either of themselves, or with regard to his particular temper, have a considerable connection with it, and are usually the remote steps to the sin it inclines him to. I need not explain myself any farther, nor specify particulars; for whoever is engaged in any habit of sin, cannot but know, by fatal experience, what are the immediate, and what the remote occasions of it; what objects are most apt to inflame the distemper; and finally, what it is that usually lets in temptations upon him, or heightens them to a pitch that carries danger with it.

This, I say, every one in the circumstances supposed cannot but know by his own experience; which, therefore, is to direct him in what he is to do, or rather in what he is to avoid: for, if he seriously resolves to work himself out of that miserable state into which he is fallen, he must not stand considering, whether the occasion be immediate or remote; whether it threatens him with imminent danger, or only at a distance; but he must fly from it if possible, though ever so remote. He must labour to stifle even the smallest temptations in their very birth, and avoid every thing how trivial soever in appearance, that may serve to increase them. If he does otherwise, his fall is almost unavoidable; because, considering the proneness of his nature to sin, which is always ready, as it were, to meet the temptation halfway, the very remotest occasion may very easily draw him into an immediate one; and the smallest temptation, if neglected, may soon be heightened to a degree of violence, which he will not have the resolution to resist. His condition is much like that of a man upon slippery ice, who, when he is once in motion, cannot stop when he will, because his very weight carries him on whether he will or not; for so it is in some measure with one that is habitually, and by consequence strongly inclined to sin. When the passion is

once raised, though by ever so trivial an occasion, it is very hard for him to put a stop to it; for being pushed on by the weight of corrupt nature, he is often carried on to greater extremities than he either intended or could have imagined at first.

Hence it follows, that the amendment and salvation of an habitual sinner depends not so much upon the performance of any one great or difficult thing, as upon a constant practice of a great collection of little ones, and a watchfulness in shunning all occasions, though ever so remote, of the sin he is chiefly inclined to. And since his own experience can best inform him what these are, he must be his own director in a great measure.

However, since considering man's natural inconstancy, and love of liberty and ease, this constant watchfulness and performance of a great number of things, though but small of themselves, must needs be burdensome to nature: whoever is concerned in the condition I speak of, and resolved to work himself out of it, must undertake this task with *steadiness* and *courage*. *Steadiness* is necessary to render him uniform and constant, both in his exercises of devotion, and the use of all other remedies proper for his cure. An anguish devotion, made up of alternate fits of heat and cold, will never do his work; because he will always lose more ground in the one, than he will get in the other. But *courage* is no less requisite to make him to go on cheerfully in this undertaking; because the many duties that attend it, putting him, of course, under a great restraint, both by depriving him of many things he loves, and obliging him to many things he hates, will strongly tempt him to throw of the yoke, and return to his customary liberties: which temptation is so powerful, that many, who have seemingly begun with the greatest resolution, have at length been wearied out, and overcome by it.

He must therefore labour to arm himself against it; and when he finds the thoughts of liberty insinuating themselves, or any degree of despondency or sloth creeping upon him, he must immediately rouse himself with these or such like considerations; that if the restraint he suffers be painful, it is far to be preferred before the slavery of sin; that how troublesome soever it be, his condition has made it absolutely necessary; that since he has been the wilful author of his own distemper, it is but just he should submit

to the trouble of the cure; finally, he must encourage himself with considering, that the task he has undertaken will, by a constant performance, grow daily lighter upon his hands; because every victory he gets over himself, is like cutting off a limb from the body of sin he has to grapple with; and that by patience and perseverance, he will not only deliver himself from the servitude he truckles under, but prepare his soul for the crown which Christ has promised to those that conquer.

TWENTY-SEVENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE NECESSARY CONDITIONS OF REPENTANCE.

Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of penance.
Luke iii. 8.

As avoiding venial sins keeps us at a distance from mortal, so a hearty and sincere repentance strikes at the very root of it; it cancels sins past, and guards the heart against their return: But then it must be that repentance which I call hearty and sincere: the proper nature and necessary conditions whereof shall be the subject of this Entertainment.

To mark out the necessary conditions of a sincere repenttance I cannot set before you a better pattern, than what our Saviour himself proposes in the parable of the *prodigal son.* This young man, longing to be free from the subjection and constraint he was under in his father's house, demanded and obtained of him the portion due to him in reversion. Whereupon, taking leave of his father he went into a foreign country; where, in a short time, he spent all he had in luxury and riot, and fell under great extremities of poverty and want; insomuch, that, to prevent starving, he was forced to take service under a farmer, who put him to keep his hogs; and his hunger was so great, that he was even glad to eat of the husks that were thrown to the swine. But the sense of his misery brought him to himself, and gave him the first thoughts of returning to his father. He discoursed thus with himself: *How many hired servants in my father's house abound with bread, and I here perish with hunger? I will arise, and go to my father, and say to him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee; I am not now worthy to be called thy son; make*

me as one of thy hired servants. Luke xv. 17, &c. Which resolution he performed accordingly, and was thereupon again received into favour.

This is the parable of the *prodigal son,* as far as relates to my present subject. Let us now make the application of it. You see the first step he made towards his being reconciled to his father, was the feeling sense he had of his unhappy condition; for had he remained insensible of it, it is probable he never would have thought of returning to his father. This marks out to us the ground-work and foundation of a sincere repentance, viz. the feeling sense a sinner ought to have of the miserable state his soul is fallen into, by having renounced the subjection and obedience he owed his heavenly Father.

Now, that this ground-work of repentance, which is to support the whole building of a new spiritual life, may be solid and lasting, it must be laid upon a double motive, viz. the double malice and deformity of sin; *first,* in relation to God; and, *secondly,* in relation to his own soul. A sinner, therefore, that will lay the foundation of a solid repentance, and work himself into a hearty sense of his unhappy state, must consider, with a serious reflection, that he has offended a God of infinite majesty; rebelled against his divine sovereign; trampled upon his sacred laws; trod under foot the precious blood of Jesus Christ; violated the covenant he made with him at his baptism; been false to his vow; ungrateful to a benefactor, that has heaped infinite blessings upon him; despised his friendship, and preferred before it the sordid interest or pleasure procured him by his mortal enemy, the devil.

These truths, well considered and digested, will, with the blessing God usually gives our endeavours, open a sinner's eyes, and excite him to horror and detestation of his past disorders. But when he has thus considered the malice and enormity of sin, as it is an offence to God, he must then proceed to consider it with relation to his own soul: and here he will discover a frightful scene, and find himself reduced to a state of misery in soul, infinitely lower than the *prodigal son* was in body, by having left his father's house. A soul in grace is the darling of Heaven, the joy of angels; the adoptive son of God, destined to inherit an everlasting crown; the spouse of Jesus Christ, and temple of the Holy Ghost; rich in merits, and adorned with all the precious

ornaments of virtue, to render her acceptable to so divine a guest.

But, O good God! What a change, at the very moment that a mortal sin is consented to! The most dreadful and surprising disasters that ever have been heard of; all the tragical scenes God's wrath has ever exhibited on the theatre of this world; all the desolations and plagues war and famine have ever caused; all the revolutions of states, reduced from happiness and plenty to misery and want, are but weak images of it. Imagine the greatest beauty transformed into a hideous monster; imagine the heir-apparent of a crown become a slave; imagine the richest monarch in the world reduced to beggary; finally, imagine a glorious and wealthy city laid waste, and turned into a heap of rubbish; and whatever you can imagine will come infinitely short of the change wrought in a soul which, from the state of grace, falls into that of mortal sin.

But, to return to the parable of the *prodigal son.* As soon as he was become sensible of the folly he had committed in quitting his father's house, he took this resolution, *I will arise, and go to my father;* which he performed without delay. Here we have the second condition of a sincere repentance marked out to us, viz. a firm and efficacious purpose to rise from sin, and quit all the occasions of it. For, without this purpose, all is but a sham repentance. *If thou art penitent,* (says St. Austin,) *be sorry for what thou hast done; if thou art sorry for it, do it no more. For if thou continuest to do it, thou art no penitent.*

It is doubtless, a manifest delusion to imagine there can be a true conversion of the heart, without any change of actions: because a heart that is truly converted, loves God, and values his friendship above all things of this world. For, as a soul falls into sin, by preferring some interest or pleasure before Almighty God, so she rises again from sin, by preferring God before all interest or pleasure, and loving him more than any advantage or pleasure this world can propose. Now, it is principally by our actions we must judge, whether we love God to that degree as to prefer him effectually before all things of this world; because all deliberate actions proceed from some love or inclination of the heart. Love is the root, and our actions are the frut; and it is by the nature and quality of the fruit

we must judge of the nature and quality of the root from which it grows. *A good tree*, (says Christ,) *cannot bring forth bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bring forth good fruit.* And it is by the fruit we must know whether the tree be good or bad.

How can we then rationally judge the root is changed as long as there appears no change of fruit? How can we judge the heart is truly converted, whilst the actions remain the same? That a person has a sincere detestation of his past sins, and yet continues in them? Finally, that the love of God is predominant in his heart, when no effect of that love appears in his actions? This is wholly inconsistent with the nature of love or charity; because charity is a practical virtue, which inclines the soul to action, and manifests itself by outward works.

But, let us still keep in view the pattern we have before us of the prodigal son. *I will arise*, (says he,) *and go to my father, and I will say, father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee: I am not now worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.* He begins with an humble accusation of himself, and sincere acknowledgment of his former transgressions. He prevents his father's justice by pronouncing sentence upon himself. He not only submits to, but imposes on himself a rigorous penance, which was to last his whole life, and desires to be received into his father's house, upon no other terms than to be treated there as a common servant.—Whereby we are not only taught that humility is an essential part of repentance, but also instructed in the very method how this virtue is to be practised by a penitent.

In the first place, therefore, the *prodigal son* begins, as I have observed, with a sincere acknowledgment of the fault he had committed. He makes no apologies or excuses for himself, but represents his fault under the most aggravating circumstances, by owning himself guilty of a most grievous offence, both against God and his father.

It is a great remark of a sincere repentance when a sinner makes a plain and full confession of his sins, without the least dissimulation or disguise; when he lays the state of his conscience clearly open before his confessor, without mincing the matter, or any studied excuses, or artificial palliations: When, finally, he is so disposed, that were it in his power, he would open his heart as fully to him, as it is

known to God himself. For such an humble disposition is a sign he has a feeling sense, both of the offence he has committed, and the desire he has to discharge his conscience of it: But when a penitent uses certain artifices to palliate his sins, in order to save himself a little confusion; when he interweaves his confessions with apologies and excuses, or indirect accusations of others, to shove off part of the blame from himself; or what is worse, when he wilfully omits some material or aggravating circumstance, it is a sure mark he is void of that humble disposition which a penitent ought to bring with him to the sacred tribunal: Because, whoever has a true sense of having offended God, and considers he has deserved to suffer eternal confusion before God and man, is willing to submit to a short humiliation, in exchange of the everlasting shame and confusion he has deserved. He thinks himself most mercifully dealt with, in being only obliged to discover that to a single person, who is under the strictest obligation of secrecy, which, if he were treated according to his merits, would be laid open to the view of all the world, and cover him with everlasting shame and confusion.

When, therefore, a penitent has faithfully practised this first lesson of humility, by submitting to the confusion of a sincere and full declaration of his sins, let him proceed to the second, consisting in a hearty desire to satisfy God's justice by *worthy fruits of repentance.* This lesson of humility is clearly taught us in the behaviour of the *prodigal son.* For having humbly confessed his fault, he is so far from soliciting from an entire exemption from punishment, that he even suggests to his father the manner how he deserved to be chastised by him. *I am not worthy* (says he,) *to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants.* This marks out plainly to every penitent, of what rank soever he be, that from the time of his reconciliation to his heavenly Father, till the last moment of life, he is bound to become an humble and faithful servant of Jesus Christ, submit to all his laws, and stoop to the humble yoke of the gospel. This, with repeated acts of a sincere contrition, is precisely his duty, in the faithful discharge whereof he may hope to satisfy the justice of his offended Father, by worthy fruits of repentance.

It is certain, indeed, that the divine justice demands a kind of proportion between punishment and sin. But, the

measure of this proportion is unknown to us. God will exactly observe it in the world to come; and he who endeavours to come nearest to it in this, does certainly put himself in the securest way to salvation. But this rule being very general, is apt to perplex great sinners, who yet are the persons particularly concerned in the comfortable moral of the parable of the *prodigal son.*

I suppose, then, that a person who has led a disorderly life for a long time, is touched with a sincere repentance, and being desirous to return to God, asks what he must do in order to it. I answer him in short, that after he has made a general confession of his whole life, and accepted the particular penance his confessor shall enjoin him, he must, from that time forward, be faithful in performing all the duties of a Christian life. Nothing can be more reasonable and practicable than this. Let me explain myself: He must, I say, be faithful in performing all the duties of a Christian life; that is, he must renounce sin, and all the occasions of it: He must live in an entire observance of the commandments of God, and the precepts of the church, to the utmost of his power: He must suffer all crosses God sends him with an humble patience: Finally, he must be faithful in the discharge of all the duties of his respective state, and endeavour to do all this in the spirit of penance, supplying what may be wanting to the rigour of it by a profound humility, and the constant practice of some voluntary mortifications.

But since an end can never be attained without the use of proper means in order to it, the practice of the duties I have mentioned draws after it an indispensable obligation of a regular and uniform devotion: This being the channel through which God's grace must pass to strengthen a penitent in the good resolutions he has made, and enable him to walk on steadily in the path of God's commandments. The principal branches of what I call a regular and uniform devotion, are morning and evening prayer; a devout observance of Sundays and holidays; the daily reading of some spiritual book, and the use of the sacraments at set times. All which must be regulated with a due regard to the respective circumstances a person is under.

This is the task a repenting sinner must undertake of what state or condition soever he be. No rank or quality can exempt him from it: Though he be a crowned head,

if he pretends to enter into the true way of penance, he must perform all the duties I have marked out. This he must do, cost what it will. He must renounce sin, and all the occasions of it; and since it is an undoubted maxim in morality, that he who is obliged to the end, is likewise obliged to all the necessary means in order to it: it follows, that a regular and uniform devotion is also an indispensable part of his duty, because without it he cannot obtain the grace necessary to enable him to live up to the character of a Christian.

This also draws after it an obligation of all such voluntary self-denials as he shall find necessary to subdue his passions, and to preserve in himself the spirit of a penitent. If a repenting sinner be perseveringly faithful in the discharge of these duties, he needs not doubt but he is in that narrow way which leads to salvation. For *he who puts his hand to the plough, and looks not back*, that is, who lives in the practice of all Christian duties whatsoever, and continues in them to his death, *is fit for the kingdom of God*, and will certainly be saved.

Thus then, you see all the steps a sinner must make in his return to his heavenly Father; he must begin with a deep sense of the disorders of his life past: He must make an efficacious purpose to rise from sin: He must undergo the confusion of a full and clear confession of his sins: Finally, he must resolve to satisfy God's justice by worthy fruits of repentance. I have shewed what this imports, and the obligations it draws after it. It concerns us now to consider, whether the recovery of God's favour be not well worth a cheerful compliance with these duties. I have not mentioned any extraordinary rigours, being sensible all are not strong enough to bear this yoke; but the yoke I have proposed is no other than that of the *gospel*, which Christ himself has imposed on all his followers; and therefore, whoever says he is too weak to bear it, declares implicitly his resolution not to do penance, nor save his soul.

It is true, a sinner newly converted cannot live up to all the duties of a Christian, without using great violence to himself. But he must consider that *penance* is a *laborious baptism*, and that he cannot be saved without doing penance. He must consider that heaven is to be gained by violence, and that whoever pretends to attain to it any other way than that of subduing his passions, pretends to have

found out a new path, wholly unknown to the four Evangelists. Finally, he must consider, that the particular difficulties he will meet with from the strength and violence of his passions, as they are the fruit of his past sins, so are they a just punishment of them, to which he must submit, and draw an advantage from, by making it a part of the penance, by which God's justice is to be satisfied. He has invited an enemy into his country, and he must be at the trouble of driving him out by force of arms: But to be successful in this spiritual warfare, he must resolve never to lose courage, nor suffer himself to fall into the least despondency, either of God's grace or mercy, who will most certainly crown such patient endeavours with the reward promised to those who persevere to the end.

TWENTY-EIGHTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE DANGER OF DELAYING REPENTANCE.

Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day. Eccl. v. 8.

The delay of repentance has proved fatal to thousands. How many, forming to themselves imaginary schemes of returning to God some time or other, they knew not when, have at last been hardened in sin, and died impenitent? How many, again, projecting to execute their resolutions of amendment at some fixed time, have been prevented by a sudden and unprovided death? I know habitual sinners are apt to flatter themselves, that since sudden deaths are but rare, they need not disquiet themselves with excessive fears on that account. But I heartily wish they may not find their error when it is too late. And since it is an error, of the most dangerous consequence, I shall endeavour to disabuse them, by shewing that the number of those, who are surprised by death, is far greater than is usually imagined; which shall be the subject of this Entertainment.

The point is question being a matter of fact, you may perhaps expect to be entertained with frightful relations of persons suddenly carried off by apoplexies, or found dead in their beds, after they lay down in perfect health; or crushed with the fall of a house; or struck dead with thunder; or burnt alive with some accidental fire. But it

is not my intention to trouble you with a long enumeration of accidents of this nature: Neither do I design to lay any stress upon the many tragical relations of hurricanes, that have laid whole countries waste; of inundations, wherein many thousands have perished in a moment; or, finally, of frightful earthquakes, that have in an instant levelled whole cities with the ground, and buried their unfortunate inhabitants under their ruins.

It is not my intention, I say, to insist upon these, or such other unquestionable facts; though they might suffice to convince us, on the one hand, that the number of those who are surprised by death is not so small as is usually imagined; and to assure us, on the other, that the odds each one has on his side is a very unsafe foundation to build any security upon. For though a concurrence of natural causes contributes, for the most part, to occasion those great and general disasters, and some places are more obnoxious to their unhappy influences than others, yet we ought principally to consider them as instruments of the divine wrath, justly provoked to those exemplary chastisements by the sins of the people; and, by consequence, till we are sure our lives were more innocent than theirs were, or that the sins of the nation are less crying than theirs, which we have no great encouragement to think; we have reason enough to fear the divine justice which never wants means to execute its decrees, may sooner or later condemn us to taste of the bitter cup so many have drunk before us.

I shall only touch upon one familiar reflection, before I come to my principal proof. Is there any one amongst us, arrived at the age of a man, who has not one time or other been exposed to some danger, in which it was at least an equal hazard that he might have perished? It is true, Almighty God has been so merciful, as to have hitherto preserved us on these occasions; and without all dispute, his goodness ought rather to affect us with a due sense of gratitude, than encourage us to persist in sin upon a rash presumption of being still favoured with the like protection. However, it is most certain, that our having escaped past dangers is a proof that we have been really exposed to them; and if these be so common, that we cannot, with all the precautions possible, prevent our being every now and then concerned in them, it follows plainly, that it is a great rashness to build any security upon our hopes of not

falling under the misfortune of a sudden and unprovided death.

But to come to my principal proof, I give it now for granted, that those sudden deaths which are occasioned by unforeseen accidents, are not so frequent, but that each particular person may have considerable odds on his side, that it will not be his misfortune to perish that way: yet give me leave to tell you, there are other sorts of death, which in effect, are really sudden and surprising, though they appear, and are vulgarly esteemed otherwise: for may not all those be properly said to be surprised by death, who are overtaken by it much sooner than they expected? Or, may not that be called surprising, which comes upon us when we look not for it, and therefore finds us unprepared? We shall certainly think it so, if we but consult the most ordinary and familiar notions of things. A general of an army is, for example, said to be surprised, when his enemy attacks him either unlooked for, or much sooner than he expected. A criminal who thinks to have his trial put off, when he finds himself summoned to the bar before the time imagined, is truly surprised, and taken unawares. In like manner, therefore, all those upon whom death seizes much sooner than it is looked for, are properly surprised by it.

Now, is not this the case of most worldly persons, that is, of those who are lovers of this world? There is great reason to believe it so; *first*, because it being very natural to flatter ourselves with the hope of what we heartily wish and desire, it follows that those who love this world, as they desire to stay long in it, so are they apt enough to believe they shall, and make their wishes the measure of their hopes; and therefore it is no wonder they should be greatly surprised, when they find both the one and the other wholly disappointed, by an untimely or unexpected end.

The *second* reason is, because the thought of death, being an ungrateful entertainment to those that are fond of this world, they usually decline as much as they can; and if it sometimes obtrudes itself, they immediately divert it with some more pleasing thought. Now what can be the consequence hereof, but that whenever it comes upon them it comes wholly unlooked for, and finds every thing out of order? For can anything come more unlooked for, than what we scarce ever so much as thought of? Those indeed who often entertain themselves with the thoughts of death,

and contract a kind of familiarity with it, take care not to be unprepared, because they live in daily expectation of it. But as for those who never think of it but against their wills, how should they ever be prepared for it? And if they never are prepared for it, how should it but surprise them when it comes?

But, to pass from general reasons to particular instances; I shall chiefly exemplify in two sorts of persons: the first are those who have their heads full of worldly projects; one, for example, is in pursuit of some great fortune; another has his children to settle in the world; another has a project of raising his family; and so forth. Now, though projects of this nature be not only lawful in themselves, but absolutely consistent with the watchfulness a Christian ought to have, and the concern of his soul, yet many times it happens quite otherwise; but particularly in relation to those that have but little sense of religion, and are cold in the practice of its duties. For when persons of this temper happen to have any worldly business upon their hands, they generally pursue it with that eagerness and over-earnest application, that the heart is wholly engaged that way, and scarce anytime or thought is allowed for the more weighty concerns of eternity.

But, alas! how often does it happen, that whilst they are thus busy in pursuing their worldly projects, death is at the same instant pursuing them close at the heels? How often does it happen, that before their beloved designs are brought to an issue, a mortal distemper overtakes them, and hurries them, perhaps in two or three days warning, to another world? And are not these men now surprised by death, whom it thus cuts off before they have got half way to their intended journey's end? They probably reckoned upon many years of life, or at least sufficient time to accomplish their designs; in the meantime the concerns of eternity were neglected; no preparation was made, no provision laid up for the life to come; and here they find themselves, all on a sudden, in the hands of death, and summoned before God's tribunal, without having taken any measures to dispose them seriously for that great trial, on which their everlasting lot depends. And is not this a very great and dreadful surprise?

The second sort of persons usually concerned in this misfortune are those who put off the reformation of their lives.

either wholly or at random, or to some prefixed time they propose to themselves. As, for instance, a young man that is vigorous and healthful considers death at a great distance, when it will perhaps seize him within a few days. He depends upon the advantages of youth, or the strength of his constitution, and doubts not but to see many years pass over his head. This flattering prospect of a long life encourages him to let loose the reins of his youthful passions, and indulge himself in all sinful liberties. He thinks it will be time enough to become sober and virtuous when the heat of youth is over; for then he resolves to take up in earnest. But, alas, he is quite out in his accounts! Death, that inflexible executioner of the divine decrees, overtakes him in the full career of his youth and youthful passions; he is suddenly nipped, like a fair blossom in an April frost; all his fine purposes are blasted: his body, which but a few days before was so vigorous and healthful, is sent cold to the grave, and his soul to the tribunal of God, there to receive her irrevocable doom. And does not death again come very unlooked for, and unexpected, to all persons under these unhappy circumstances.

Another finds himself deeply engaged in some habit of sin; and, upon hearing a sermon or reading some good book, is made sensible of the danger of his state, and resolves to mend. But he cannot come to a resolution to set about it immediately. Some business of moment lies upon his hands, and must first be dispatched: he is under certain engagements, which must first be broken; and this cannot be done all at once: but he will have more leisure and opportunity afterwards, to apply himself seriously to the concern of his soul's salvation. With these and such like plausible pretences, which, in effect, are but suggested by, and serve to flatter corrupt nature, he deludes himself into a persuasion, that it is better to put off the business of his designed reformation till these pretended obstacles are removed.

But what happens in the mean time? Whilst he is thus seemingly big with resolutions, to be executed he knows not when, a mortal fever seizes him: the doctor is immediately sent for; who, to increase his misfortune, flatters him perhaps to the very last with hopes of recovery; till manifest symptoms of approaching death appearing, he is at length forced to tell him his case is desperate, and that he must prepare to die. And what a dreadful surprise, what a thun-

der stroke must this be to one in his condition! I can compare it with nothing more properly than the consternation of a city surprised by an enemy: and as in this case nothing is done orderly, or according to the rules of discipline, but all things are carried on with hurry, disorder, and confusion: so in the case of a person unexpectedly alarmed with the news of approaching death, no order or method is observed, but every thing is performed with a precipitation answerable to the pressing exigency of the unhappy condition of the party concerned.

A priest is sent for in haste. As soon as he comes a confession must be made, though without any regular preparation, because the case admits of no delay. The other sacraments follow of course, with the same hurry and precipitation; and with this lame preparation his soul goes forth to try her fortune in the other world. But I leave every one to judge, whether a person in this case be not surprised by death, since it obliges him to hazard his soul upon so weak a bottom, and undertake his great voyage of eternity, with such a disproportioned and irregular preparation, as cannot but render his salvation extremely doubtful: and since this happens but too frequently, it follows, that the case of those who are surprised by death is not so rare as is usually imagined.

But you will ask, how can that death be called surprising, which having some days of sickness before it gives the party concerned warning of his coming, and consequently sufficient leisure to prepare himself? I answer, that the death of a person habituated to sin, and in this condition seized with that distemper, whereof he dies in a few days warning; his death, I say, is truly and effectually surprising. My reason is, because although he has some days of sickness allowed him, yet, morally speaking, he can scarce be said to have sufficient leisure allowed him to prepare himself. The case is evident, if the distemper happens to affect his head, and take away from him the use of his reason: for alas, where is then the very possibility of making any manner of preparation! And is there any thing more ordinary, either in malignant fevers, or other mortal distempers, than to have the use of reason quite taken away, and the party concerned wholly incapacitated for any serious, nay, rational thought? So that in this case a person under the forementioned circumstances is as effectually surprised by death

as if he were shot dead with a cannon-bullet: since it cannot be doubted but that death is truly surprising, which excludes all possibility of a preparation, by whatever accident the possibility of it is occasioned.

It is true it seldom happens that sick men's ravings are so uninterrupted as not to allow them some lucid intervals, in which they may be capable of reflecting on the danger of their state: but supposing all this, and even allowing them the use of reason as much as men mortally sick can have, yet, considering their sad state on the one hand, and the disadvantages of a dying man on the other, we may still say that, morally speaking, such a one has not sufficient leisure to prepare himself. The reason is, because the sufficiency or insufficiency of the time or leisure cannot be justly measured, but with a due regard, partly to the nature of the work that is to be performed, and partly to the circumstances of the party concerned: because what is sufficient leisure for an easy piece of work, and to one that lies under no impediment, may be altogether insufficient for a work of a difficult nature, and in relation to a person that labours under such hard circumstances, must needs be a very great hindrance to his due performance of it.

As, for example, much less time and leisure is required to make up a short and easy account, than one that is much entangled, and has been neglected for several months and years; so that if a careful steward, who daily makes up his accounts, should be summoned by his master at half an hour's warning, though the time of half an hour be but short in itself, yet that steward would not be taken unawares, because his daily care in looking into his accounts secures him against all possibility of a surprise; but if another steward, that has neglected his accounts for several years, should be called upon by his master, and that at a time when he is laid up with a fever, or a gout, we may truly say, that though he had a whole week's warning given him, he would be taken unawares; because, though a week be much longer than half an hour, yet since it is not only disproportioned to the difficulty of the work he has to perform, but his indisposition renders him, over and above, incapable of setting heartily about it, it follows, that he would be as really and effectually surprised, as if he had been summoned upon one-half hour's warning.

Now, this is a lively image of the case before us, if we

consider it with a due regard, both to the difficulty of the work that is to be performed, and the impediments that hinder the performance of it: for, *first*, as to the difficulty of the work that is to be performed; to express it in a word, it is a true change of heart corrupted with habits of sin, and accustomed to resist the divine inspirations; of a heart that has been an utter stranger to the love of God, and hardened against the most powerful motives to soften it into compunction. And is this work to be begun in our last sickness? Is that a proper time for so difficult a task? Or is it such an easy matter to banish from the heart a predominant love, that has been long fixed and established in it? Do we find by experience, that we can love or hate the same object, and change our affections and aversions just as we please? Nay, does it not convince us, on the contrary, that to disengage the heart from any passion of long growth, is a work which requires both time and patience, in a long practice of serious endeavours? We are sure St. Austin found it so: who, in his *Confessions*, owns, that even after his judgment was fully convinced, his stubborn and rebellious heart held out for many years.

It is true, there is no difficulty in repeating a verbal act of contrition, or pronouncing an act of the love of God: but there is a large difference between saying and doing. If sorrow and repentance were no more than so much lip-labour, the case would be much altered from what it really is; but there is something more required than this: the heart must be truly changed, and speak within what the tongue pronounces outwardly: Almighty God, who for many years has been contemned, and set at nought, must be truly and sincerely loved above all things: The object of a passion, that has always been cherished, must be truly hated and detested: And here lies the stress of the difficulty, which, since it usually costs, even those that are in perfect health, much time and labour, we may easily guess how little a person, struggling under the pains and terrors of approaching death, is qualified for the performance of it. For if this be a difficult task, even in time of health, when the mind is composed and serene, and the party concerned has all the advantages of prayer, pious books, and reiterated consideration, to come to his assistance, how will he be able to perform it in any tolerable manner, when being seized with a violent and mortal distemper he is rendered

almost utterly incapable of using any of these exercises, and consequently deprived of every thing that should be a help and encouragement to him?

For can there be imagined a greater hindrance to a serious application to any business, that requires thinking, than a sickness, whereby the whole body is put in a violent ferment, and disordered in the highest degree? Do we not find by experience, that even a slight indisposition, suffices to render us incapable either of reading or praying with any tolerable attention? And why so? Because the soul, attending then to the pain itself, is diverted by it from attending to any other object: and how then will she be able to apply herself to the weighty concerns of salvation, when the body will be seized all over with a mortal anguish?—When the head is disturbed with violent achings? The stomach tortured with unspeakable oppresions? The heart besieged on all sides with the pangs of death? How can we imagine, a person in this condition capable of an application answerable to the greatness and difficulty of so weighty a concern? So that it is evident, a sinner's last sickness is so far from giving him sufficient opportunity to prepare himself for death, that there is no part of his whole life more improper for it; and, by consequence, we may justly fear, that though he has the use of his reason for some days, death takes him unprovided, because he has neglected to make any provision for it before-hand, and is at that time under such hard circumstances, as are the greatest impediments imaginable to a due preparation for it.

Thus we plainly see the danger of delaying repentance, because either a sudden death may prevent the very possibility of it: or, if our last sickness allows us some time, it usually obstructs the due performance of it, with such difficulties as cannot but render the sincerity of it very hazardous and uncertain. Let us then practise the advice given us by Ecclesiasticus, *Not to delay to be converted, nor to defer it from day to day.*

TWENTY-NINTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE NECESSITY AND EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

Ask, and you shall receive. John xvi. 24.

Prayer, when duly performed, is the great remedy against sin, and whoever prays well cannot but live and die well; if therefore we fail in the one, and miscarry in the other, we must attribute it either to the *neglect*, or some *defect* of prayer; and conclude with St. James, that *when we ask, and receive not, it is because we ask amiss.*

There are some, who, by their neglect of this holy exercise, seem not sufficiently convinced of its *necessity*. Others, not finding their prayers crowned with the success they proposed to themselves, stagger in their faith, question its *efficacy*, and so, either lay their devotions wholly aside, or perform them only by fits and starts: Others again are indeed uniform in performing their daily task, but do it with that hurry, coldness, and dissipation of mind, that they seldom go beyond the form and ceremony of prayer. Lastly, there are some, who pray heartily indeed, and yet receive not, because they ask things not conducing to the real interest of their souls. These, therefore, being the obstacles, which chiefly obstruct the use or fruit of prayer, I shall speak of them in the three following discourses, and shew, 1. Its *necessity* and *efficacy*. 2. The *conditions* that ought to attend it. And 3. The *end* to which it ought to be directed. The *necessity* and *efficacy* of prayer shall be considered in this Entertainment.

The entire dependance we have upon Almighty God, is a convincing proof of the necessity of prayer, which is the ordinary channel through which God's grace is conveyed to the soul. Now, to prevent the least doubt of our depending entirely on God, Christ himself has declared it in the strongest terms. The passage I mean, is that of the 16th chapter of St. John, where our Saviour compares himself to a *vine*, and all Christians to the *branches* of it: for of all branches, none are more useless than a vine branch, when it is not nourished by the vine: For it can neither bear fruit, nor be adapted to any manner of use; nay, (as Ezekiel says,) not so much as to serve for a pin to hang a vessel on; but is only fit to be burnt. And therefore our Saviour

pursues the similitude thus: *As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in me. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit. If any one abide not in me, he shall be cast forth as a branch, and shall wither, and they shall gather him up, and cast him into the fire, and he burneth.* John xv. 4, 5, 6.

Nothing can be a more lively representation of our entire dependance on the grace of Jesus Christ, than what is set forth in this similitude. However, lest we should imagine his grace to be only necessary for the most difficult acts of virtue, he closes the forementioned parable with these remarkable words; *without me ye can do nothing.* Whereupon St. Austin discourses thus: *He says not, ye can do little without me, but ye can do nothing without me.* Whence he infers, *wherefore whether it be much or little, it cannot be done without him, without whom nothing can be done.* No, not the least thing conducible to salvation can be done, without the grace of Jesus Christ. And therefore St. Paul assures us positively, *not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God,* (2 Cor. iii. 5.) and in the hymn said in the mass, during the whole octave of Pentecost, we address ourselves thus to the divine Spirit, *sine tuo numine nihil est in homine, nihil est innoxium;* that is, *without thy grace man has nothing but what is sinful.* Hence it plainly follows, that without God's grace we can neither practise virtue, nor overcome sin; and it remains now only to consider, whether prayer be not the ordinary means appointed by God to obtain this blessing. These words of Christ, *ask, and you shall receive:* and again, *pray that ye enter not into temptation,* (Matt. xxvi. 41.) leave no room to doubt of it. And therefore, both St. Thomas of Aquin, and the holy Fathers before him, teach unanimously, that it is decreed by God from all eternity, that no blessing shall be received but by the means of prayer.

St. John Climacus tells us, that *prayer is the source of all virtues, and the channel through which the grace of Jesus Christ, and all gifts from above are conveyed to us.* He calls it *the nourishment of the soul; the light which dissipates the darkness of the mind; an excellent remedy against temptations; a pledge of God's love to a soul, and a mark of predestination.*

St. Austin calls prayer the *key of Heaven*, which unlocks all its treasures, and gives us access to the blessings there laid up for us: others compare it to *Jacob's ladder*, by which angels ascend to Heaven, to represent our necessities to the *giver of all good gifts*, and descend again on earth, to bring us new blessings from thence; and therefore, as we stand daily in need of God's grace, to strengthen us against the temptations we live continually exposed to, so it is our duty to beg it daily of him.

The 17th chapter of Exodus contains a remarkable figure of this truth. It is there related that the Amalekites, having raised a formidable army to dispute the passage of the Israelites into Canaan, Moses commanded Joshua to lead them on against the enemy: but at the same time, being sensible that God alone could give the victory, he retired to the top of a neighbouring mountain with Aaron and Hur, in order to implore the divine assistance. The next day therefore, whilst Israel fought against Amalec, and Joshua performed all the parts of a general, Moses prayed for a blessing upon his people, and ceased not all the time from lifting up his hands to Heaven: But the battle lasting many hours, he was so tired with that painful posture, that he could not hold them up any longer; and the scripture observes, that as soon as Moses let down his hands Aaron and Hur perceived from the top of the mountain, that Amalec prevailed against the Israelites; whereupon Moses sat down upon a stone, and Aaron and Hur, placing themselves on each side of him, supported his hands, and immediately the Israelites recovered the ground they had lost, and gained a complete victory.

This is a plain figure of what happens to us in our spiritual combats. For as the Amalekites endeavoured to oppose the passage of the Israelites into the Land of Promise, so the devil employs his utmost strength to obstruct our happy passage to the heavenly Canaan. The means then to disappoint his malice, is to retire daily to the mountain of prayer, and there humbling ourselves under the powerful hand of God, by a deep sense of our weakness, implore his merciful protection, and never cease lifting up our hands to Heaven, till we have obtained a complete victory over him. For if we grow weary of this holy exercise; if sloth prevails upon us to let fall our hands, that is, to abandon or discontinue our prayers, the enemy will most cer-

tainly gain ground and prevail against us: Because God's holy grace being our only security, if we forfeit this blessing, by a neglect of the means appointed to obtain it, we become destitute of strength, are left to our own weakness, and our condition is no better than that of soldiers presuming to come into the field naked and unarmed.

St. Austin, to express our spiritual poverty and dependence on the divine assistance, says, *we are all beggars of God.* It is therefore fitting, and he requires it of us, that we should address ourselves to him with the same unwearied application as beggars do to keep themselves from starving: for a beggar is never weary of asking, as long as there are hopes of getting anything; he waits whole hours at the rich man's door; he watches all occasions to meet him, and lay his necessities before him; when alms are to be distributed, he is never out of the way: In a word, as hunger and want attend him every day, so it is his daily business to seek for relief.

This then must be our pattern, in relation to the duty of prayer: This must be our constant method, if we intend keeping our souls from starving, as they will certainly do, in case we neglect to procure them the supplies they daily stand in need of. We must never be weary of asking, since Almighty God is never weary of giving: we must be daily knocking at the gates of our bountiful benefactor, and lose no opportunity of presenting ourselves before him, especially when he is present on the altar, where he is an inexhaustible source of blessings to those who make their humble supplications to him, and come with hearts dilated to receive them: Finally, we must proportion the earnestness and assiduity of our prayers to the greatness of our necessities and wants.

But the slothful Christian pretends to be at a loss to find a precept that obliges him to pray every day. But, if I should ask him what precept obliges him to eat every day, he would not be much at a loss to answer the question: he would soon tell me, a natural principle of self-preservation obliges him to it: he would tell me that unless his body was daily nourished, his strength would fail him; he would be unable to do his work, and starve for want of it. Now let him apply those reasons to the soul, which they have at least as much weight, and he will soon see the obligation of daily prayer. For doubtless our souls have as just a title to

our daily care as our bodies; and therefore, since prayer is their necessary nourishment, if we pray not every day, our spiritual health will be impaired, and decay by insensible degrees: we shall be unable to discharge the duties incumbent on us: Finally, our souls will languish for want of their due allowance of spiritual food to support them.

You will ask, does it not suffice then to keep the Commandments, as they are delivered to us? Does it not suffice to hear Mass on Sundays and holidays, according to the precepts of the Church? To the first question I answer, it is not to be doubted, but whoever keeps the Commandments will be saved: But can the Commandments be kept without the help of God's grace? Or, will God bestow his grace upon us without our asking? Are we not daily tempted to sin against the Commandments? And has not our Saviour ordered us *to pray that we enter not into temptation?* Does he not bid us *ask, seek,* and *knock?* Nay, *to pray always, and never be weary?* And why so? Because, as the devil is indefatigable in seeking our ruin, so ought we to be indefatigable in soliciting Heaven to protect us against him; so that the very obligation of daily keeping the Commandments implies an obligation of daily prayer; and we need no other commandment, than the Commandments themselves to oblige us to it: because the same law that commands any duty, induces of course an obligation to employ such means as are necessary for the discharge of it.

Now, as to the precepts of the Church, which only obliges us to hear Mass on Sundays and holidays; the Church, in limiting this obligation, had a prudent regard to the generality of Christians: And, since she foresaw that many would be under circumstances, which would render their daily complying with this duty morally impossible, and sloth might prevail upon others to trespass frequently against it, she would not impose a daily obligation, which would be the occasion of endless struggles to some, and a stumbling-block to others. But it is very certain, the Church's intention was not either to encourage sloth, or to inspire us with an indifference to hear or not to hear Mass upon ordinary days, but rather to create in us a great esteem of this devotion, by making it a necessary and principal duty of the most solemn days of the year.

But there is a second objection particularly against the

efficacy of prayer, grounded upon the little appearance of its fruit in many persons, who seem to be much addicted to it. For if prayer were so powerful a remedy against sin, as I have endeavoured to shew, the consequence would be, that the more we prayed, the more we should be exempt from failings. Whereas the contrary appears in many, who, though they daily spend much time in prayer, yet have their failings, as well as they who pray less.

To this I answer, *first*, that, if they who pray very much are still subject to many failings, it is probable their condition would be still worse, in case they prayed less. Just as when a person has an ill habit of body, the remedies he takes will not hinder his being often out of order; but in all likelihood, his case would be much worse, if he took less care of himself; and therefore, as there are some malignant humours, which cannot be corrected but by a long course of physic, so there are some distempers in the soul, which, according to the ordinary course of grace, require a much longer application of remedies than others; and it would be next to a miracle if a passion of long growth, and deeply rooted in the soul, were perfectly mastered on a sudden.—So that the objection proposed proves not the weakness or inefficacy of the remedy, but the malignity of the distemper it sometimes meets with.

However, St. James has given another answer to it in these terms: *Ye ask, and ye obtain not because ye ask amiss.* Many seem, in outward appearance, to pray very often, yet, in effect, pray very seldom: they recite indeed many prayers, and are very busy in turning their books, or dropping their beads, yet, with all this pother, pray very little; because prayer is not a mere lip-labour, but consists principally in the desire of the heart; for, to speak properly, vocal prayer is nothing but the desire of the heart expressed in words; so that where there is no desire of the heart, there is no prayer, though the lips and tongue be ever so busy. Now it is certain, there are many who read or recite their prayers without any sincere or hearty desire to obtain the things signified by those prayers: and by consequence, there are many who say their prayers without praying.

This is the case, *first*, of those that say their prayers by rote, and out of mere custom, without any application of the mind; for these pray not much better than so many parrots, that should be taught to repeat our Lord's Prayer: in ef-

fect, if their distractions be voluntary, all their praying is no more than talking so much in their sleep. *Secondly*, it is their case who resolve to continue in the immediate occasion of sin; for how can they have a hearty desire to overcome sin, who resolve to live exposed to such occasions as will certainly lead them into it? *Thirdly*, it is the case of all such as come to pray with an actual affection to sin; because a wilful affection to anything is inconsistent with a hatred of it. Now we can only have a hearty desire to be delivered from things which we regard as evils, and have by consequence some degree of hatred to.

Thus we see how persons may seem to pray very much, and yet pray very little in effect; because they may ask without desiring to obtain; and therefore it is no wonder, if praying in this manner, they continue subject to all the infirmities of corrupt nature: for it is not by such mock prayers a sinner draws down mercy from Heaven; it is the prayer of a *contrite and humble heart*, the prayer of a soul sensible of her unhappy state, and earnestly desiring to be delivered from it, which God has a regard to. And therefore, if our prayers prove unsuccessful, it is an evident mark they were defective some way or other. And this is so certain a truth that it can admit of no dispute.

For since Christ has made us a positive promise, that *his Father will grant us whatever we shall ask in his name*, it follows, that we must either question the veracity of his promise, or conclude, that when we fail of obtaining what we ask, there has been some defect in our prayers, which has justly deserved a refusal; supposing always that what we asked was for the good of our souls: and therefore whoever prays to be delivered from his usual failings, and yet continues in them, will find, upon a serious enquiry, that he either has not prayed as much as he ought, or has been guilty of some neglect in the performance of it. So that, upon his falling into any sin, let him but call himself to an account, and reflect seriously, whether he took care to raise his heart to God at the first approach of the temptation? Whether sloth hindered him not from kneeling down, and lifting up his hands to Heaven, when he had the opportunity to do it? Whether his daily task of prayer has been ever neglected? Finally, whether his heart has performed its duty, as well as his tongue? For these enquiries will lead him to the true source of his failing, and convince

him that he has not obtained, because he has not asked as he ought.

Let us then resolve to be constant in performing this great duty; let no morning or evening pass without allowing our souls a sufficient portion of this spiritual nourishment. They both need and certainly deserve this care as well as our bodies: for do what we can to preserve our bodies, they must sooner or later return to dust: but the noblest part, our souls, must be nourished for eternity.

It is true, indispensable business may sometimes be a lawful hindrance; but we must take care it be not the pretence, when sloth is the real cause of it. If the concern of our souls be as it ought, we shall easily forecast things so, that temporal affairs will seldom interfere with our duty to God: for where there is a real and hearty concern for anything, it suggests a thousand expedients, which coldness and indifference would easily overlook. We may perhaps imagine a neglect of this nature to be of little or no consequence.—It is certain, however, that when it is often repeated, and proceeds from coldness and sloth, it is not so trivial a matter as some take it to be; but, on the contrary, both very displeasing to God, and dangerous in its consequence.

THIRTIETH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE PRINCIPAL CONDITIONS OF PRAYER.

You ask and receive not, because you ask amiss.
James iv. 3.

Having now shewed the necessity and efficacy of prayer, the conditions which ought to attend it offer themselves next. These therefore shall be the subject of this Entertainment.

A Christian, in time of prayer, ought to consider himself as a criminal that comes to throw himself at the feet of his offended sovereign, and implore his mercy; for what are we, in effect, but criminals, that have offended the infinite majesty of God? What are we but rebellious subjects, who have lifted up our hands against our Divine Sovereign, and depend wholly on his mercy for our deliverance from the sentence of eternal death, which our sins have deserved? Now, if our hearts were thoroughly penetrated with this truth, when we come to present ourselves before Almighty God in prayer, it would inspire us with an awful respect,

and help to keep us within those bounds of decency which suit both with our condition, and the business we are about.

Our condition, as I have said, is that of criminals; and our business in time of prayer is to implore God's mercy; we ought therefore to appear before him in the posture of criminals, that is, in the most submissive and respectful manner possible; and be careful to avoid whatever carries with it an air of vanity and presumption. The humility of our hearts ought to manifest itself in the humiliation of our bodies, and our very looks and postures ought to act the part of supplicants, as well as our tongues.

However, I mean not here to encourage singularity, or affectation, in which vanity or hypocrisy have usually a greater share than devotion. There are some who with their groans or the loudness of their prayers, disturb all that are near them, or draw their eyes upon them by certain actions or gestures, fitter for a private oratory than a public assembly: These are apt to delude themselves, and imagine they are truly humble, because they are so in appearance. True devotion is hearty and earnest, but not noisy; it is a regard to decency, but avoids ostentation and shew; finally, it seeks to edify, but begs not the applause and esteem of men.

There is, therefore, a mean between overacting devotion, and shewing no devotion at all; and our behaviour, especially in our time of public prayer, ought to be so regulated between these two extremes, as to be free from all appearance of affectation on the one hand, and edify by all the marks of solid piety on the other: For though the devotion of the heart be a tribute we owe to God alone, yet that exterior devotion, which consists in a respectful composure of the body, is a duty we owe both to God and our neighbour; and no man whatever, unless disabled by sickness or infirmity, is exempt from the obligation of it; because no person in the world is too great to serve God with decency, or appear before him in an humble manner: Nay, the greater a man's condition is, the more he is obliged to it in relation both to God and man; in relation to God, because being particularly indebted to him for the temporal advantages he enjoys above others, he is bound in gratitude to appear more zealous in his service; as those that are greatest at court, are bound to espouse the honour and interest of their prince with greatest zeal: They are also

under a stricter obligation with regard to men; because, having more the eyes of men upon them, and whatever they do being of much more powerful influence than the actions of those who move in a lower sphere, they have it in their power either to promote the decency of God's service, by recommending it to others by their examples, or to bring it into contempt, by shewing a contempt of it in their practice.

It is true, the outward posture of the body is not of itself essential in the duty of prayer; for a man may pray sitting, standing, walking, or lying down, as well as kneeling: a traveller may pray upon the road, a tradesman in his shop, a ploughman in the field, and a sick man stretched out upon his bed; but there is a difference between what necessity imposes, and that which is the effect of vanity, indifference, and sloth: So that the disposition of the heart is usually manifested by the outward posture of the body, when a person has it in his choice. Thus wandering looks are a symptom of a dissipated mind: affecting certain airs in the church, betrays a vanity not suiting with the disposition of a supplicant, or a heart humbled before Almighty God: Finally, lolling in a lazy posture, or kneeling on one knee, when all knees ought to be bent to adore Jesus Christ present on the altar, is an indecency which plainly shews not only a want of devotion, but a deadness of faith, and furnishes the enemies of the Church with arms against us: it appearing highly improbable that they, who believe Christ really present, should behave themselves disrespectfully before him.

But though the outward decorum or respect ought to be carefully observed in time of prayer, the inward attention of the mind is of much greater importance; because if this be wilfully wanting, our prayer is defective in its very substance; for what is prayer, but the elevation or raising of the mind to God? When therefore the mind is not raised to God, but either kept down with the weight of earthly cares, or distracted with the frivolous amusements, the consequence is, that there is no prayer: again, what is properly vocal prayer but the desires of the heart expressed in words? For the tongue is but the interpreter of the heart; and words are designed for no other use than to signify what passes within the mind: If therefore they have no connexion with our thoughts, they are in themselves no more than

empty sounds, and a mere lip-labour, which God has no regard to. It is the prayer of the heart, as I have already said, that moves the divine mercy to compassion: it is the prayer of the heart that mounts like incense up to Heaven, and brings down the promised blessings to us. So that if the heart prays not, the motion of the lips and tongue, though ever so busily employed, can no more properly be called prayer, than such a number of words repeated by a man out of his senses.

Let no man therefore flatter himself that he has prayed much, because he has recited a great number of prayers, unless he be sure his heart has performed his part as well as his tongue; for though our lips move without interruption, our prayer is interrupted as often as we deliberately interrupt our attention, which is the life and soul of prayer: But when the heart, in time of prayer, is not taken up with amusements, that are indifferent in themselves, but consenting to some sinful passion, or meditating some unlawful design, then it becomes that sort of prayer which the scripture pronounces abominable in the sight of God.

However, I speak only of distractions that are voluntary, and every one must be his own judge how far he is guilty of them; for as to those that are involuntary, and pass without reflection, it is certain they are no prejudice, either to the merit or efficacy of prayer, provided there be no negligence on our side: And it is no less certain, that in our state of natural weakness, in which we are not masters of our imaginations, it is humanly impossible we should be wholly free from them: so that all we have to do, is to use reasonable endeavours, that we neither occasion them by a wilful previous neglect, nor entertain them with reflection, when they obtrude themselves upon us. When we have secured those two points (which however ought to be done without an over-scrupulous solicitude, or putting our conscience upon the rack about it: so that if we doubt whether we have entertained them with reflection or not, we ought to judge in favour of ourselves; it being morally impossible to have a full reflection without knowing it.) When, I say, we have secured these two points by a moderate care, we ought to look upon distractions, how frequent soever, as temptations not consented to, and ourselves as mere sufferers in them; nor draw any consequence from them to discourage us from a cheerful perseverance in this holy ex-

ercise; which is the third condition necessary to render our prayers effectual and acceptable in the sight of God.

This condition is plainly marked out to us by Christ himself, in the 11th chapter of St. Luke; where he proposes the parable of a man, who coming to his friend by night to borrow some loaves from him, is at first refused; but continuing to beg and knock at his door, obtains at length his request by his importunity and perseverance: And though the application of the parable be clear, our Saviour himself was pleased to make it in these remarkable words: *And I say to you, ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall he opened.* These are Christ's own words, which, as they plainly teach us that perseverance is a condition of prayer, so they encourage us to the practice of it, by shewing its power and efficacy, and representing its fruit and success as owing to it. The same is likewise marked out in the prayer of the Cananean woman, who obtained of Christ by her importunity, and forced him, as it were, to grant to her perseverance, what he had denied to her first prayer.

However, to be rightly understood, I mean not by perseverance in prayer, a daily continuance of it for many hours together, or that our prayers are to take up the greatest part of the day; for this is too violent to hold; and experience has afforded but too many instances that grasping at too much often ends in doing nothing at all. A traveller that has a long journey to make, is in danger of fainting, or stopping short by the way, if he overstrains himself at first, and a constant moderate pace will sooner bring him to his journey's end than running himself out of breath by fits and starts. And so it is in the practice of devotion; we have perhaps a long journey to go; if therefore we overstrain our devotion, we shall run it out of breath before we get half way. This has been seen in many indiscreet devotees, who, measuring their strength by their own vanity and presumption, neglected the rules of moderation; and in process of time, finding themselves overcharged, grew weary of the burden, threw off the yoke that galled them, and ran insensibly into the opposite extreme.

It is certain, that a surfeit of devotion is as dangerous to the soul, as that of meat is to the body; when we are once

cloyed with it, the appetite is ever after set against it, and it is hard to come again to relish it, even in a moderate way: so that the rule of praying ought, in a great measure, to be the same as that of eating: we must take daily enough of it to nourish our souls; but we should usually rise from prayer, as from table, with an appetite: this will make us more willing to come to it again the next day, and the same practice being repeated every day, our devotion will become uniform and regular: and it is this I mean by perseverance in prayer, and recommend as a point of the greatest importance, and assured means to obtain daily the measure of grace we stand in need of, for the support and nourishment of our spiritual life.

I suppose then that every Christian, who has a concern for his soul, will oblige himself, by the advice of his director, to some regular devotion, suited to the circumstances he lives in. As to those that are engaged in a religious state, they have their path marked out before them, which if they but follow, they cannot go astray. It will certainly lead them to a happy end if they never go out of it; and the only advice I have to give them is, never to amuse themselves with particular private devotions, till they find they are every day exact and punctual in practising those that are prescribed them by the constitutions of the house they live in. This is properly the uniformity and perseverance in prayer suited to their state, which nothing but sickness or obedience to the orders of superiors, ought ever to interrupt: this is the perseverance which will render their prayers efficacious, and draw down the blessing of Heaven upon them.

But as those that live in the world, they being under no constraint of rules or vows, are free to choose that method of devotion which suits best with their circumstances. But when their choice is once well made, they ought not easily to change it; because this leads to fickleness and inconstancy, which is the bane of perseverance, and the most dangerous enemy it has to struggle with; for nature seeks change and variety in every thing, even in pleasures: so that pleasures themselves if not seasoned with variety, become tedious, and we grow weary of them. This is certainly a great weakness in human nature, and it is that weakness which we call *inconstancy:* but if this prevails upon us, even in things that are of themselves agreeable and pleasing, it is easy to judge what strength and resolu-

tion we stand in need of to bear up against it in the practice of duties, to which we have a natural repugnance. So that whoever resolves seriously to be perseverant and uniform in the duty of prayer, must be prepared for this combat against himself, that is against his own natural inconstancy: he must not be surprised to find a repugnance to do the same thing every day, nor discouraged if this repugnance grows violent upon him; for if he lets himself be overcome by it, he is in danger of losing all the fruits of his past devotions; but if he yield not to it, he may justly regard it as a trial of his virtue, which will not lessen, but increase the merit and efficacy of his prayer.

Prayer is a duty, and since every duty is a kind of clog and constraint upon human nature, it is no wonder the practice of it should not be attended with any sensible satisfaction. This is indeed sometimes the reward of prayer, but never a quality or attribute belonging to the nature of it; so that we are not bound to pray with *pleasure*, but we are bound to pray with *perseverance*, whether we find a pleasure or disgust in it, whether an inclination or repugnance to it: this is precisely our duty; this God requires of us, and will reward with a plentiful blessing, if we be faithful in the discharge of it.

But besides the temptation of *inconstancy*, which we shall always have to struggle with in this holy exercise, we must also arm ourselves against that of *despondency*. We are naturally impatient in all our desires, and instead of waiting with an humble submission for the will of God, we would have it at a beck or call. If the fruit of our prayers answers not immediately our expectations, we fall into dejection, and are ready to consult our ease, rather than continue an exercise, which we begin to regard as a fruitless labour. This was not the practice of the *royal prophet*, who says thus of himself, *expecting, I expected the Lord:* which repetition of the same word is an hebraism, importing a long and patient perseverance in waiting for the will and pleasure of Almighty God. And what was the effect of it? He tells us in these following words, *and he listened to me, and heard my prayers.* The prophet Isaiah exhorts us to do the same, and promises the same success: *If the Lord* (says he) *makes delay, wait for him: for he will certainly come, and he will not tarry.*

It becomes not sinners to stand upon terms with their

offended God, or pretend to set him the time of his mercies. It is our business to do our duty, in hopes of obtaining at length the blessing we pray for, and resist with an unwearied perseverance all discouraging suggestions, as snares laid for us by the enemy of our souls. This is the method of the children of this world in their temporal concerns: they are indefatigable in following their suits, soliciting their lawyers, appealing from one court to another; and are thought happy if they obtain at least a favourable decree, though purchased with incredible pains and cost. And this ought also to be our method in the business of salvation; and particularly of those who labour under more than ordinary difficulties, they must be indefatigable in pursuing their point, never weary of soliciting Heaven, never discouraged at seeming disappointments: If they leave off praying they give up the cause for lost; but if they persist in it, with an unwearied patience and perseverance, they have solid grounds to hope a happy issue, and that God would take his time to cast a favourable regard upon them. Their very perseverance in prayer is a fruit of their prayer, and pledge of future mercies in store: For Almighty God, who is infinitely good and merciful, bestows not his favours by halves, and when he gives the grace of perseverance in prayer, it is a mark he designs to give much more, and reward those happy dispositions his grace has already formed, by granting not only what we have so long prayed for, but favours that surpass our highest desires.

Thus, when we see the principal conditions requisite to render our prayers effectual, and the true meaning of this promise of Christ, *Ask, and ye shall receive. Ask*, that is, pray with *humility* and *respect*, pray with the *heart* as well as the *tongue*, pray with *perseverance*, and you will certainly receive. For it is an undoubted truth, that Christ will not be wanting to his promise, if we be not wanting to our duty; and that if we pray and receive not, the true and only reason is, because we pray amiss.

THIRTY-FIRST ENTERTAINMENT.

THE END OR INTENTION OF PRAYER.

You ask and you receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it on your concupiscences. James iv. 3.

THE latter part of this text discovers a considerable irregularity, relating to the *intention* or principal *end* of prayer. And though I can scarce suspect any Christians so corrupt as to pray for things with an express intention to be furnished with means to satisfy their lusts, yet it is not to be doubted but that Almighty God, who is the searcher of hearts, sees them often so disposed, that if he should grant them the temporal blessings they pray for, they would most certainly abuse them to their own eternal ruin, by employing them in the gratification of such passions as have the greater ascendant over them.

This obliges me to give some directions concerning the general end or intention of prayer, especially when any temporal concern is the immediate subject of it. For when we pray for spiritual things, which in their own nature have a relation to the good of our souls, our prayers cannot be displeasing to God, provided they want not any of the conditions I have already spoken of in my last discourse: but when some temporal blessing is the immediate subject of our prayers, there is always some danger of swerving from the intention by which they ought to be directed; and so they may be either pleasing or displeasing to God, according to the end we have principally in view; some directions then relating to this end shall be the subject of this Entertainment.

All moral actions have a tendency to some principal end, which we call the motive or intention, for which we act; and it is this end that makes them either good or bad: But with this difference, that actions which are bad in themselves can never become good by being done for a good end: whereas, those that of themselves are indifferent or virtuous, become absolutely good or bad, from the principal end or motive we propose to ourselves in the doing of them. Prayer (for example) is of itself a religious duty: yet if the motive of our praying be to get the esteem and applause of men, instead of being devout we become hypo-

crites, and shall receive our reward with the Pharisees, who stood praying at the corner of streets, that they might be seen by men.

In like manner, if the principal end of our prayer be the obtaining of some temporal good, and stops there, I may properly call it a mere interested and selfish devotion, prompted by, and wholly tending to gratify self-love. Not that we are forbid to pray for temporal things: For Christ himself has taught us to ask our *daily bread:* and to pray *to be delivered from evil:* And the practice of the Church encourages it, by ordaining public prayers to avert or prevent public calamities. But in praying for temporal things we must have a farther view, and whilst these are the immediate subject of our petition, they must be referred to a nobler end, and regarded only as means subservient to it.

If you ask me what this end is, I answer, that it is no other than God's glory, and the good of our souls. The reason is, because as Almighty God, to whom our prayers are addressed, is a pure spirit, so the principal end of our prayers ought to be purely spiritual, and as God bestows upon us his temporal blessings, not for their own sake, but to serve us as means and instruments of salvation, so we must ask them with the same intention: If this be wanting, our prayers are unworthy to be presented to, and accepted by Almighty God, as not being conformable to that end, to which all things in this world are ordained by their great Maker, and which alone deserves to be regarded by him.

Thus when we pray for health, our end must be to employ it in God's service; if the subject of our prayer be to beg reasonable conveniences of human life, we must at the same time have a better life in view; and desire the helps and comforts of the one, only as means to forward us on in our journey to the other: Finally, if we importune Almighty God to deliver us from evils that oppress us, or dangers that threaten us, Heaven and the good of our souls must still preponderate in our hearts. This must be our chief concern, this regarded as our principal interest; and all other things with subordination to it. Whoever prays with this disposition, is sure to be heard; that is to say, is sure not to be disappointed in the principal end of his prayer, though he obtains not the temporal good he prays for; but not regarded, or if he obtains the thing he asks, it is a token of God's anger, rather than his mercy towards him.

This is St. Austin's doctrine, who delivers it in these remarkable words. *Quædam* (says he,) *negat propitius Deus, quæ concedit iratus*, that is, *God refuses some things when he is propitious, which he grants when he is angry.* He refuses them, when he is propitious, because he knows they will be hurtful to us; and he grants them, when he is angry, because he foresees they will become our scourges, or by our abuse of them, be the occasion of our future ruin. What a comfort is this for those who wait with patience for the will of God, even when their prayers are seemingly unregarded? And how ought it to check the impetuosity of our desires when they are ready to mutiny against Heaven, because they are not gratified in the way they ask for.

When the sons of Zebedee engaged their mother to ask of Christ, that *one of them might sit at his right, the other at his left hand, in his kingdom*, he checked their ambitious requests, with this answer, *ye know not what ye ask:* and this is literally true, whenever we pray for any temporal concern: we truly know not what we ask; because we know not whether it will promote or hinder our salvation: we know not whether it will draw God's blessings, or his malediction upon us. And if then, in this case, instead of an *angry grant*, he sends us back with a *propitious refusal*, have we not reason to sit down content, and bless his infinite goodness for having had more regard to our real interest than the irregularity of our desires? Are we not ungrateful to God, and unjust to ourselves, when upon any disappointment we lash into murmurs and complaints, and are ready to accuse his providence of impartiality in the distribution of his temporal blessings?

But, Almighty God regards these complaints as the tears of senseless children; and, as he best knows what is expedient or necessary for us, so he has also a truer love for us than we have for ourselves. *A loving father*, (says Christ,) *gives not his child a serpent for a fish, nor reaches him a scorpion for an egg.* We often indeed act the part of senseless children; we cry out for the *serpent*, imagining it to be a *fish*, and reach our hands out greedily at the *scorpion*, mistaking it for an *egg*. But our Heavenly Father shews himself a father indeed, and pitying our childish mistakes, is deaf to our cries, and refuses us the trifles we ask to our prejudice, to bestow real and solid goods upon us; unless, perhaps, provoked by our impatience and murmurs, he

lays aside the tenderness of a father, lets us have our own wills, and leaves us to smart under the just punishment of our rebellious lusts.

We have a figure of this truth in the person of Rachel. She had been barren for several years; which, in the time of the old law, was looked upon as a great disgrace: but, she bore her affliction so impatiently, and her desire of being delivered from it was so immoderate, that she declared she should die with grief, if she were not blessed with children: *Give me children, or else I die*, was her prayer. At length she had children given her, and died in a painful labour; so that what she had begged with so much impatience, as the only means to save her life, became, by a just disposition of the divine providence, the occasion of her death.

And how many parents have also too eagerly importuned Almighty God for the blessing of the marriage state, and found it afterwards the greatest cross of their old age. How many, afflicted with sickness, in which they might have sanctified their souls, have impatiently begged for health; but when they enjoyed it, abused the benefit against their benefactor, and turned reprobates? How many, in fine, have prayed for riches, which, if not abused by themselves, were by their children made the support of their extravagancies, or an occasion of endless broils? And how happy had these persons been had Almighty God been propitiously deaf to their prayer? Had he mercifully refused to hearken to their inordinate requests, which he granted in his anger, to punish them with those very things which they asked, undoubtedly, without any regard to the end they ought principally to have proposed to themselves.

This truth is confirmed by a terrible example, related in the 11th chapter of the book of Numbers. It tells us, that the Israelites in the desart, being weary of eating nothing but manna, began to murmur, and cry out for flesh; and thereupon importuned Moses to intercede for them to God, to grant them their desire. Moses, though sensible of the unreasonableness, and apprehensive of the dangerous consequence of it, yielded to their importunity, and addressed himself to God in their behalf; but the scripture says, his wrath was highly kindled against them: and who would have expected anything here but a flat denial? But it happened quite otherwise; God told Moses, that since

the Israelites had cried out for flesh, they should have it; and thereupon caused a wind to blow such a number of quails into their camp as was sufficient for the whole multitude; who fell immediately upon their prey, and thought themselves happy in having obtained what they had longed for; but it cost them very dear: for the meat was yet between their teeth, as the scripture expresses it, and the wrath of God fell upon them, and destroyed many thousands of them upon the place; which from that time was called *the sepulchre of inordinate lust:* because the Israelites had there inordinately lusted after flesh.

This example shews how dangerous it is either to repine inordinately, under the condition God's providence has allotted to us, or importune him for temporal blessings, with an absolute submission to his holy will and pleasure. It is also a convincing proof of what St Austin had told us, that *God denies some things when he is propitious, which he grants when he is angry.* And so we see, that wicked men are generally more successful in compassing their ends, than devout and virtuous Christians. Because the children of this world are permitted to enjoy this world, and have their wills gratified now, but their punishment is to come hereafter: whereas the just, being considered by Almighty God as his own children, he refuses to put those things into their hands, which may be an obstacle to the eternal happiness he has prepared for them.

Thus it often happens that a virtuous Christian, being much afflicted with sickness, prays to God for health, and he hears him not, because he foresees that if he had his health he would abuse it: another labours under great want, and petitions earnestly for life; but God is deaf to his prayers, because he knows the poverty he suffers is more conducive to his salvation than the relief he prays for; a third is eagerly bent upon some worldly business, in the success whereof he promises much happiness and satisfaction to himself. But Almighty God foresees, that what he pursues as a means to make him happy, will prove the occasion of his ruin; and therefore, has no regard to his mistaken prayer, but lets all things fall out cross to his desires. In all which cases, what appears to us as a refusal, is a real grant of greater favours than those we sue for, though not so pleasing to our inclinations: however, like children when crossed in their wills, we are apt to break out into

complaints, as if we had recived hard measure; and if God bore not with this our weakness, but dealt with us as he did with the Israelites in the desart, by gratifying our desires, we should, like them, find but too soon the effects of an angry grant, and wish too late to have been favoured with a *propitious refusal.*

To come now to a conclusion; the principal fruits we must draw from this discourse, is a firm resolution to make the will of God the sole rule and measure of all our desires: and what is the undoubted will of God, but that in every thing we pray for we should consult, above all, his honour, and the good of our souls? This is plainly taught us both by the *preface*, and every order of the petitions in our *Lord's Prayer*, which is the pattern of all other prayers; and, in effect, all other prayers offered to Almighty God are but a paraphrase upon it. We are taught then by its *preface* to address ourselves to God, as our *heavenly Father;* to put us in mind that, being his children, we must have a zeal for his honour, seek to inherit the kingdom he has prepared for us, and be governed by him rather than our own wills and desires: and therefore these three petitions, 1. *Hallowed be thy name*, 2. *Thy Kingdom come*, 3. *Thy will be done*, have the first rank, and are placed at the head of all the rest, to mark out to us, that they must over-rule all our other prayers, and be as settled principles and maxims presupposed to, and implied in everything we ask. Whoever prays for a temporal concern with these previous dispositions, will find the fruit of them in a solid peace and tranquillity of mind, whether he meets with a grant or refusal of the things he prays for.

I will instance in the particular case of sickness, and address myself to those who are much afflicted with it, and pray for health. I ask them precisely, upon what terms they pray for it? and whether they desire their recovery, whether it be or be not pleasing to God? whether it be for the good or prejudice of their souls? If they be disposed, as the Israelites were in the desart, they will answer that they will put that to the hazard; that their business is to have health, no matter how. Perhaps they will not speak so plain; but if they be so disposed at heart, which is all one, it is no wonder if they be impatient and fretful, and ready to murmur against God, when their desires are not gratified. And all I have to say to them is to wish them a better disposition, and that God, instead of giving them

health, will mercifully turn their hearts, and make them become better Christians.

But if, on the contrary, they answer from the bottom of their hearts, that they would choose to suffer the most painful sickness, even to their last health, rather than ask any thing that should be displeasing to God, or prejudicial to their souls: oh! then let them pray on with these happy dispositions, and employ all natural means ordained by the Almighty for their recovery, though both the one and the other should prove ineffectual; because they are sure not to be disappointed in the main end of their prayer. It is true, they pray for health, and obtain it not; but they pray not absolutely for it, but only upon this occasion, if it be God's holy will and pleasure. So that the principal subject of their prayer is, that the will of God be accomplished: when therefore the event has manifested that it is God's will that their sickness should continue, have they not obtained the principal end of their desire? and they will certainly acquiesce to it with an entire repose of mind, if their prayers were sincere: for if they pay not a hearty submission to it, but appear dissatisfied with the event, and repine under the weight of their cross, it is a mark that when their tongues pronounced these words *thy will be done*, their hearts spoke another language: for it is a contradiction to seek the will of God sincerely, and not submit to it when it has manifested itself in the event.

However, this hinders not the giving grains of allowance to nature. A good Christian is as sensible of pain as a bad one; and a fit of the gout, stone, or cholick, will force complaints from the one as well as the other. But place before a good Christian his ease on the one hand, and the will of God in opposition to it, on the other, and bid him take his choice, and he will certainly prefer God's will before his own ease; and it is precisely in this preference that the heart speaks, gives the law to all irregular desires of nature, and finds a solid peace under the most acute pains of the body. This is that peace which the Apostle recommends to the primitive Christians, for the guard of their hearts and intellects; which the martyrs found amidst the bitterest torments which nothing but a hearty submission to the will of God can procure us; which, finally, is the greatest blessing of this life, and a pledge of future happiness; which God, through his infinite goodness, grant us all. *Amen.*

THIRTY-SECOND ENTERTAINMENT.

FOR THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW YEAR.

Jesus advanced in wisdom, age, and grace.—Luke ii. 52.

THE gospel, from whence these words are taken, is yearly read to us at our very entrance into the new year, because it places an example before us which ought to direct us in all the several stages of life. For, whatever concerns a man may otherwise have upon his hands, the principal business of a Christian is to increase in grace and virtue as he grows up in years. He is a traveller in this world; heaven is his home; his life is a journey to it; and the main business of a traveller is to be daily advancing nearer to his journey's end: so that the sun should never set upon him, without finding him as many steps nearer heaven as it finds him nearer to his grave.

Here then let us consider whether we have hitherto been directed by this great rule. Are we already as much advanced in virtue as we are in age? Have we gained ground upon our corrupt inclinations, proportionably to the steps we have already made towards our graves? Has every year made some considerable change for the better? And do we find ourselves as much better as we are now older than we were last year, or the year before, or some years ago? Alas! how is it to be feared there are but few who can, without wronging truth, give this account of themselves! How is it to be feared, that but too many upon an impartial review of themselves, will find they have rather lost than gained ground! And what will be the end at the long run? What will become of us, if we thus continue from year to year under the same sinful habits? If the end of every year finds us either worse, or not much better than it left us in the beginning? Must not such a course as this terminate in our everlasting ruin?

That therefore we may become thoroughly sensible of the danger that threatens all delaying sinners, and by consequence of the necessity of taking up in time, and beginning a new life with the new year we are now entering into, I have made choice of an easy and familiar truth to convince all persons, conscious to themselves of being in an unsafe or dangerous way, that their eternal lot may, per-

haps, depend upon the measures they take this very year. The truth then I mean to offer to their most serious consideration, and which shall make the whole subject of this Entertainment, is this, viz. that this very year may be designed by Almighty God to put a period to their lives, and be the last they are ever likely to see.

That the year we are now entered into may be the last of our lives is a truth so certain, that nothing but a presumption, even to a degree of madness, can incline us to entertain the least doubt of it: And therefore it stands not so much in need of proofs to convince the judgment, as of a serious meditation to imprint it in our hearts. It is certain we are not master of our own lives, nor is any man privileged even to know, much less to carve for himself, the portion of life he is to enjoy. We are but tenants at pleasure; and God alone, of whom we hold our being, who has hitherto preserved it, and will one day put a period to all time; he alone, I say, has the power of life and death in his own hands, and measures out to every one the number of their days, according to his will and pleasure.

Whence it evidently follows, that since no man can positively promise himself even one single day or hour, much less can he pretend to an infallible assurance of out-living the year we have now before us. Youth cannot secure any one of it, since many thousands are yearly nipped in the very bud, or cut off in the flower of their age: Neither can our being now in perfect health, or the particular advantage of a good habit of body, insure our lives for any length of time; because we find, by doleful experience, that there are many times scarce one hour's space between the most perfect health and a mortal distemper, under which the very strongest constitution cannot hold for many days: to say nothing of violent deaths occasioned by accidents, against which no precaution can shelter us, and to which both young and old, weak and strong, infirm and healthful constitutions, are equally exposed.

How many in the world are now actually upon their death-bed, and expecting hourly their summons before the tribunal of God, who, but a few days ago, were as likely to live as any of us? Nay, how many are now dead, and cold in their graves, and already become the food of worms, who perhaps, but some few months or weeks ago, had as

good a prospect of a longer life before them, and as fair hopes of surviving those they have left behind, as the very youngest and most healthful of this assembly? What reason then have we to promise ourselves another year, more than they seemed to have, so small a time before they were taken out of this world? Are our lives anything better insured? Or are we not liable to the very same accidents, which so soon blasted all their flattering hopes of a long life? And why then may not their case happen to be ours, before another twelve-month goes round? Why may not this year put a period to our lives, as well as the last year made an end of theirs? Our bodies are made of the same clay, our lives hang by as slender a thread, and are exposed to all the same hazards, either of a violent or natural death as theirs were.

Add to this, that as the last year has sent many thousands to the other world, who at the beginning of it were as likely to live as any of us; so nothing is more certain, than that many thousands more, even within the precincts of this island, will never see the end of this year: And who can assure any of us, that it will not fall to our share to be of the number? What reason have we to promise ourselves a privilege above any of our fellow-mortals? It is true, the matter being doubtful and uncertain, it is not at all unreasonable to hope the best: but since it is doubtful, it is also a great folly not to fear the worst, and downright madness not to provide against it. The very possibility of it, considering how great a concern is at stake, is motive enough to make us as effectually resolve upon all the necessary preparations for it, as if we had an infallible assurance that it would happen to us.

But, alas! there is more than a bare possibility in the case. The many dangers we are exposed to within the compass of a year, that of a violent death on the one hand, or a natural one on the other, make it more than barely possible, and give sufficient grounds for a reasonable apprehension of it, and the necessary precautions against it: for let us but consider how many unforeseen and altogether unavoidable accidents may happen in much less time than the compass of twelve months. May not the slip of a foot, the stroke or fall of a horse, a violent cold, or malignant fever, or apoplectic fit, make an end of us in a very short warning? And are we not continually liable to some of

those misfortunes? But suppose Almighty God should visit us with a plague, (the case is not impossible) or any other epidemical distemper that is mortal, as we know not but he may, who is there, in this case secure of his life even for one single day? So that you see our not out-living this year, is not a mere imaginary supposition, without ground or reason: But the hazard of it is great enough to oblige any one, who truly tenders his soul's salvation, to resolve, without delay, upon such measures as may put him into the condition he would be found in, whenever it shall please Almighty God to call upon him.

Oh! how many miserable souls are now burning in unquenchable flames, who might have been happy souls in Heaven, had they but taken this course a year ago: many were perhaps exhorted to it, and forewarned of the danger that threatened them, just as you now are; but presuming they had still time enough before them, and thereupon neglecting the summons of the divine mercy, were cut off in the midst of their disorders, and when perhaps they looked least for it, and are now doomed to everlasting torments: And who can tell, but if, like them, we should continue deaf to the voice of mercy calling upon us, death, the executioner of God's justice may likewise overtake us, when we are least aware of it, and appoint us to receive with them the deserved reward of our folly?

There is a parable in the 13th chapter of St. Luke, which seems to threaten all delaying sinners with this misfortune, and suits exactly with the main subject of our discourse. Our Saviour proposes it in these terms: *A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it, and found none. And he said to the dresser of the vineyard, behold, for these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and I find none: Cut it down therefore; why cumbereth it the ground? But he answering said to him, Lord, let it alone this year also, until I dig about it, and dung it, and if happily it bear fruit; but if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.*

This is the parable, and the moral of it is plain and obvious. The *barren fig-tree* is a lively figure of a mere believing Christian; who though he be planted in Christ's vineyard by baptism and faith, and watered with many graces and favours; yet his faith, being dead and barren, yields no fruit of good works: However, Almighty God,

the great master of the vineyard, looks yearly for fruit from him; and if, after many years expectation, he finds none, he resolves at length to cut him down: but upon the earnest supplications of some of his chosen servants, or the prayers of his holy Church, the execution of this dreadful sentence is deferred for some time: A reprieve is granted to him, perhaps for another year, in hopes of his bearing fruit: In the mean time, the dresser of the vineyard digs, and lays dung about him; that is, uses all necessary care, either by private admonitions, or public exhortations, to put him in mind of his mortal condition, and the danger of his state: But if, after all care taken to make him become fruitful, he continues barren as before, as soon as the time of forbearance is expired, the decreed sentence of death, which is but the fore-runner of a more terrible one, is, without further delay executed upon him.

Now, let us apply the whole parable to ourselves, and see how far we are concerned in every part of it: and, in the first place, let us, upon a general review of our lives past, consider, whether the lasting barrenness of the *fig-tree* be not a faithful representation of our unhappy state: for how many years are now already past since we first contracted the sinful habit, in which we still find ourselves as deeply engaged as ever? How many years has our merciful Lord already expected *worthy fruits of penance* from us? And have we hitherto yielded him any thing but empty promises, fruitless desires, and resolutions without effect? How justly then may he make this complaint of us, *Behold these ten, twenty, thirty years, have I sought fruit on this fig-tree, and I find none?* And how justly then might he long since have sentenced us to be cut down, and cast into the fire?

His patience, indeed, and long forbearance, is nothing less than a miracle of goodness; it is not to be doubted but unless some favourite souls had stood in the gap, and disarmed his justice so often provoked by our reiterated sins; unless the prayers and tears of his holy Church had interposed, and obtained from time to time a reprieve for us, in hopes of our being at length cured of our barrenness, and yielding him the long expected fruit, he had many years ago ordered the earth to be cleared of us, as being but so many dead trunks, which, instead of answering the ends for which we were planted in his vineyard, are only an en-

cumbrance to it, and even apt to infect those that are yet sound, and bear fruit in due season.

But since he only forbears the executing of this sentence upon us, in expectation of our making good at length our past deficiency, by a plentiful after-crop of worthy fruits of penance, it is certain his forbearance will not hold always: some year or other will put an end to it, and who knows but our doom may be fixed for this very year? Who can tell but we may be sentenced to die, before we ever see the beginning of the next new year? For since the divine goodness has already forborne so long with us, does not the main drift of the fore-mentioned parable give us sufficient reason to apprehend our time draws near; and that the axe is already laid to the root to cut us down, unless we prevent the fatal blow by a speedy amendment, and worthy fruits of penance?

Here then it will be proper to reflect seriously with ourselves, what has hitherto been the principal obstacle to our amendment: For unless this be discovered, and care taken to remove it, our state will either be always the same; or, instead of mending with time, we shall only pass from better to worse. Now it is unquestionably true, that a long continuance in sin is either owing to some outward cause, or to some wilful neglect in the party concerned: If it be occasioned by some outward cause, every one's own experience will both give him the surest information of the true source of this weakness, and mark out to him the only expedient to prevent it in future; which is, his keeping at the greatest distance possible from that occasion: for if this be not done, all other endeavours will signify nothing. He may make the best resolutions in the world, but if he loves danger so as to expose himself to it without necessity, he will certainly perish in it; and the end of the year will always leave him either worse, or in the same condition in which it found him in the beginning.

But if, upon examination, he finds the chief obstacle of his amendment to be within himself; as that idleness, the fruitful mother of vice, has the ascendant over him; or that an over-concern for his worldly interest draws his heart from God, and the concerns of a better life: or finally, that sloth prevails frequently upon him; to neglect the sacraments, or duty of prayer, which are the ordinary channels through which God's grace is conveyed to our souls;

and by thus stripping him of his spiritual armour, lays him open to every temptations that assaults him: If, I say, he finds any of these to have obstructed his amendment of life, as those obstacles are wholly voluntary and within himself, so nothing but a change of will, vigorously exerting itself in opposition to them, can possibly remove them; and unless they be removed, his state of weakness will always continue the same, and the loss of his soul will be the unavoidable consequence of it.

If any man tells me that natural inclination alone, without any previous neglect on his side, drags him many times to sin, I answer, 1. That no man can be dragged so violently as to lose the power of resisting, because his will is always free; and there can be no sin without the free consent of the will. I answer, 2dly, That every one concerned will, upon a strict examination of himself, find, that either some preceding neglect in the duty of prayer, or his not having armed himself with vigorous resolutions in the morning, or a want of watchfulness over himself at the first approach of a temptation, when it might have easily been checked, has always been the forerunner of those consents, to which he pretends to have been dragged with a violence beyond his power of resisting. But, 3dly, I ask, whether this pretence is to hold always or not? If so, I wish it may not cover a design never to mend at all: If not, why then will he not resolve to begin out of hand, to oppose an enemy so powerful already, and who will daily get ground upon him, if a stop be not put to it by a vigorous resistance.

But time and age, says the delaying sinner, weaken all inclinations; and then they will be easily subdued. This is very true, in those who have always resolutely opposed them; for these usually pass their riper years in a triumph rather than combat. But no man in the world ever became abler to resist, whilst he held on in a custom of yielding. Nay, it is certain on the contrary, that every sinful inclination gathers strength proportionably as it is gratified; and that time, which would have weakened it, had it been resisted, serves but to increase its power, when it is often yielded to.

But to return to my principal consideration; suppose the delaying sinner be denied that time or age, on which he so much depends, for the weakening and subduing of his sin-

ful inclinations: suppose death cuts him off, whilst they are yet in their full strength, and before he has made any serious efforts towards this great work: what becomes of him then? I leave him to reflect upon the consequences of it: and since he can have no security that this will not happen to him, it is manifest he cannot answer it, I will not say to God, but even to common sense and reason, if he goes on in his usual delays, on whatever plausible pretence of present difficulties they may be grounded: because whatever his present difficulties are, time and delays will but increase them, and remove him at a greater distance from his return to God, by the same steps they daily bring him nearer to his grave.

THIRTY-THIRD ENTERTAINMENT.

ALL ARE BOUND TO SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God. Matt. vi. 33.

This precept is short, but very comprehensive, since it contains the whole duty of man. For man's whole duty in this life, is to make God reign sovereignly in his heart by grace, in order to reign hereafter with God in glory. This, I say, is the whole duty of man; and all the moral precepts, both of the Old and New Testament, are but so many explanations of the several branches of it. God commands nothing but what he knows is necessary to fit us for the possession of his eternal kingdom; and he forbids nothing but what he knows will be a hindrance to it. He commands the practice of virtue, because *nothing that is defiled can enter into his kingdom:* so that the precept of *seeking first the kingdom of God,* is a summary of all christian morality; and if we made it but the rule of all our actions it would alone suffice to render us eternally happy.

But alas! how few are governed by it! How few make Heaven their chief business, or employ their time so, as to give sufficient grounds to judge they prefer the *kingdom of God* before the pleasures or concerns of this life! if we consider the state of *christianity* in general, we shall find it sunk so low, that there will scarcely appear any marks of it left to distinguish it from *paganism,* besides the bare name, and some outward forms which cost nothing. We shall find calumny, backbiting, cursing and swearing, hatred,

envy and revenge, practised amongst the meaner sort. If we enter into the shops of tradesmen, how few shall we find there who keep their hands clean from unjust dealing, and content themselves with a lawful gain! But if we mount a step higher, and take a view of those places, where justice ought to reign, and innocence find a secure sanctuary, here we shall see crimes of a blacker die: the laws perverted, innocence oppressed, justice sold, and clients ruined instead of finding relief.

However, christianity would not groan under so general a desolation, if it found but a protection amongst the nobility and gentry, who would doubtless be its principal ornament and support, if they had a sense of gratitude for the temporal advantages they have received from God. But it is from these that christianity has received its most mortal wound. It is amongst these vice appears barefaced, and without restraint. *Religion*, which has some respect paid it amongst the vulgar sort, is by men of quality treated with contempt: *devotion* is a quality which many of them are ashamed to own; and *libertinism*, which carries infamy with it in another state, lifts up its head amongst them, with the same assurance as the most unspotted virtue. Nay, many will rather boast of crimes they never committed, if they be but modish, than blush at those they are really guilty of.

This is the unhappy state of christianity in general. The *kingdom of Satan* has spread itself over the whole face of the earth, and persons of all conditions flock to it; but the *kingdom of God* looks like a desert country, dispeopled and abandoned by its inhabitants. It is true there are some of all ranks and states, who, like Lot and Noah, remain untainted amidst the general corruption of mankind; are faithful to God's cause, and labour with a sincere zeal to establish his kingdom upon earth, and secure it to themselves in Heaven. But I fear that Lot and Noah are a figure of their number, as well as virtue, which made Christ pronounce with a kind of astonishment this terrible sentence: *the way which leads to life is narrow; and how few find it!* But the reason why few find it, is because few seek it: yet all are bound to seek it, even before all other things, as the words of my text expressly declare.

I shall therefore now endeavour to shew, that these words, *seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God*, contain a pre-

cept of indispensable obligation; in which all christians, rich, or poor, great or small, religious or laics, are equally concerned: this is the whole subject of this Entertainment.

To *seek the kingdom of God*, is the same as to make it our business to save our souls; and to *seek it first*, is to make it our chief business. So that the point in question (if it be any) is, whether all persons, of what rank or condition soever, are bound to make the saving of their souls their chief business, and prefer it to all other concerns of this life? If practice were to be consulted in this case, or the decision of it depended upon numbers, it would certainly be carried in the negative: for the general practice (as I have already observed) runs violently against it: and to judge by numbers we should be forced to conclude, that the words of my text contain a *counsel* rather than *precept*, and mark out only a securer way to Heaven, like the rule of some particular order, which all are not bound to follow.

But numbers and practice are of no weight against evident marks of christian morality. I shall insist upon two, to demonstrate the matter in question; though it be in a manner self-evident, and can scarcely be set in a clearer light than its own.

The first is, that *all rational creatures are bound to make it their chief business, to attain the end for which they are created:* because to do otherwise, is to set up their own wills in opposition to the will of God: it is to withdraw themselves from the order of his providence, and frustrate, as far as in them lies, the principal end of their creation. As to insensible or inanimate creatures, they are immediately directed to the end of their creation, by the unerring hand of the Creator, and serve as dead instruments, that never resist the hand by which they are employed. How happy would man be, if he did that by choice, which they do by impulse or necessity! for, having received a rational soul, and with it a free will to choose good or evil, he has it in his power either to tend to, or swerve from, the end of his creation.

But what is this end? Why has God placed him in this world? Was it to make it his abode for ever? Alas, the mortality of his body, and the continual change it was subject to, leave no room for this gross error; its term of life is fixed for a small number of years, it falls insensibly into decay with age and disease, and so returns into dust: but

man's better part, his soul, survives for ever! And why has God bestowed upon him this immortal being? Why has he given him a rational soul, with his own sacred image stamped upon it? Was it to enslave her to the body, and make her an accomplice in its inordinate lusts? What an ignoble end is this! How far beneath the dignity of a spiritual and immortal being! This therefore cannot be the end of our creation; and we need to seek no farther for it than in the very alphabet of christian religion; by which we are taught that the end for which we are created, is to serve God in this life, in order to enjoy him eternally in the life to come. This end is perfectly proportioned to the dignity of an intellectual and immortal being; because the noblest employment a creature can have is, to serve his Creator, and his sovereign happiness is to enjoy him. The service of an infinite Majesty is suitable to the rank of a creature honoured with his sacred image; and a life of immortality answers the noble ambition of an immortal soul; nor can he aim at anything lower without degrading himself.

We are then created as you see for two ends, viz. To serve God upon earth, and to enjoy him in Heaven. The first makes God our *sovereign Lord and Master;* and the second, our *sovereign happiness.* Let us then see, what both the one and the other oblige us to.

As he is the *sovereign Lord and Master* of the world, all rational creatures, of what rank soever, are his *servants;* and all mankind, in relation to God, may be considered as one family, whereof he is head; and in which he has established a subordination of higher and lower degrees, and assigned to every one his respective post, for the temporal as well as spiritual government of it: but he has made some general laws, delivered in the *ten Commandments,* which all are equally bound to obey. In these he has declared his holy will to all without exception: by these he has commanded kings as well as subjects, rich as well as poor, to own no sovereign lord and master but himself; to respect his holy name; to employ a day every week in religious duties; to honour those that have an authority over us, either by *nature,* or *divine,* or *human laws;* finally, not to commit any of those crimes, which the law of nature itself, written in our hearts, before it was engraven in tables of stone forbids: these are the general laws, by which our

heavenly Master commands all his servants to govern their lives and actions, upon pain of eternal damnation.

But are these all the duties he requires of his servants? I answer, that all particular duties may be reduced to them, as to their general heads; and therefore Christ being consulted by a young man, what he was to do to save his soul, gave him this brief answer: *Keep the commandments.* But since they are too short to express all particular duties, it is in this great family of the universe, as in all particular families whereof it is composed, each servant has his station or post assigned him, which marks out to him his employment, and the particular duties annexed to it: whence arises the obligation every christian has, as he is a servant to God, to regulate his life and actions so, that it may be said he employs his time principally at least in the service of his heavenly master. For what is principally the duty of a servant? It is to apply himself to his master's business, for, though it be indispensably required of him to be trusty, virtuous, and sober; yet with these good qualities, he will be a very bad servant if he be slothful, and neglects his master's concerns; and so it is with relation to the service of God. We are all born his servants; and the immediate end of our creation is, to serve him faithfully upon earth, according to the respective station he has placed us in. This is our indispensable duty; and a neglect of it is following our own wills preferably to the will of God, and perverting the order established by God's providence.

However, serving God upon earth is, as I have said, only the immediate end of our creation; but the last and principal end of it is, to enjoy God eternally: And the two ends are subordinate to one another; because our serving God on earth is required as a mean to enjoy him in Heaven. We are therefore born to serve him, because we are born to enjoy him; and our enjoying him in Heaven will be the reward of our having served him upon earth; which made St. Paul write these excellent words: *Whether we live, we live for God; whether we die, we die for God; whether we live or die, we belong to God.*

Whence results again the indispensable obligation all rational creatures have to make their salvation (which is no other than the possession of God) the principal business of their lives. God has made himself our last end: We are

therefore bound to regard him as such, in the main tendency of our lives and actions. The consequence is undeniable; because a rational creature cannot act deliberately, but for some last end; and whatever he make his last end, he makes his God; so that if it be not God himself, it is some creature, which he substitutes in his place, and prefers before him. For which reason St. Paul expressly says, that a *glutton's belly is his God*, and he calls *avarice* the sin of *idolatry;* because money is the *idol* of a covetous man; to which he sacrifices all his thoughts and actions. Thus, glory is the *idol* of ambition; and a man that loves himself to that degree, as to consult in every thing chiefly his own ease, interest, or satisfaction, is properly said to be his own idol; because whatever he designs or does is ordained to, and centres in himself.

These therefore make not God their last end, but set up their several idols in his place, to which they make a daily offering of the best part of their actions; and so do they who make not their salvation the chief business of their lives. For how can these say, they make God their last end, since the main body of their actions has no tendency to him? It follows therefore, that they place their last end in something of this world; because, since they cannot but act for some last end, if it be not God, it must be some creature: it follows again, that they live in a continual contradiction to the will of God, and such a contradiction as puts the greatest affront upon him. He has made them for himself; he has created them to serve and enjoy him. What honour, what happiness is this! But they are insensible of both; and refusing to answer these noble ends, prostitute their souls to some mean interest or pleasure, postpone God to some vile creature, and place their last happiness in the object of their prevailing passion. This is properly their crime, who make not their salvation the chief business of their lives. This is the injustice they become guilty of in not *seeking first the kingdom of God;* which shews plainly that the words of my text contain not a bare *counsel*, but a *precept* of the strictest obligation, in which all christians are equally concerned.

But the same is rendered still more evident from a *second* maxim of the Christian law: I mean, from the close connection this duty has with the precept of *loving God above all things;* which Christ calls the *first and greatest com-*

mandment of the law. This commandment is indeed of so large an extent, that all christian duties are included in it, as conclusions in their principle, from which they necessarily flow. But as some conclusions flow immediately, others more remotely from the same principle, we may say, that the duty of *seeking first the kingdom of God,* is of the former sort of conclusions, and has not only a necessary but immediate connection with the great commandment of *loving God above all things.* In a word, it is so closely interwoven with it, that it is impossible either to comply with the one without the other, or transgress against the one without transgressing against the other.

To make this evident, we need but consider what it is to love God above all things. I speak not of the love of God in its highest perfection: for this divine quality has undoubtedly its several degrees, and is always in its increase or wane till it be fixed in Heaven, where it will be rewarded with a degree of glory answerable to its merit and perfection in this life: but the love I speak of is that which is absolutely necessary to salvation, and consists in an effectual preference of God before all things in this world: so that the precept of loving God above all things obliges us indispensably to give him the preference in our hearts to all creatures, in such a manner as to be ready to sacrifice all things to him, be it honour, interest, or inclination that pretends to stand in competition with him; in a word, to love God above all things is to desire above all things to be united to him by grace in this life, and to possess him eternally hereafter.

Now what we are bound to desire above all things, we are bound to seek preferably before all things: for Almighty God contents himself not with mere barren desires, which produce no effect; as a husbandman would not be content with a tree that should only bear leaves, and bring forth no fruit: in effect, the desires of the heart are but as secret springs, that give motion to all the faculties both of soul and body, and apply them to action: nay, it is impossible they should do otherwise when they are sincere. Have we ever seen a covetous man sit idle, and not make it his principal business to hoard up money? Have we ever seen an ambitious man inactive in the pursuit of honour; or a voluptuous man without application in seeking his pleasure? No, surely, there never was an example of it: because

whatever desire is predominant in the heart, the same produces naturally a series of actions, in which there appears not only a direct tendency to the object of that desire, but a certain eagerness in the pursuit of it.

The same is therefore to be said when the love of God prevails in the heart: it is impossible our practice should run quite counter to that love, or that Almighty God should have our hearts, whilst the world has all our actions: whence it follows, that if we sincerely love God above all things, we shall also seek him sincerely before all things; and if the possession of him be the principal object of our desires, it will also be the principal object of our application and pursuit; the consequence whereof is, that the same precept which commands us to love God, that is, to value and desire the possession of him above all things, commands us likewise to make the securing of this happiness to ourselves the chief business of our lives.

The obligation then admits of no dispute, and its extent is as unquestionable; it reaches all mankind, and every stage of life, from the use of reason, is concerned in it: for, in effect, what is man's life in this world designed for by Almighty God, but to be a passage to a better? So that, from the very moment of our entrance into this mortal state, we are as passengers upon our way to the other, which is immortal. During our infancy, indeed, baptismal grace alone suffices to secure to us the everlasting possession of Almighty God: but when we grow up to the use of reason, and become full masters of our own free wills, to choose good or evil, it is then we come within the obligation, which no human power can dispense with, *of seeking first the kingdom of God:* And this obligation remains in full force as long as we live; and whoever discharges himself faithfully of it, is sure to find, at the end of his mortal race, the happy eternity he has sought.

THIRTY-FOURTH ENTERTAINMENT.

PRACTICAL INFERENCES FROM THE FOREGOING TRUTH.

Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God. Matt. vi. 33.

In my last discourse I have fully represented the obligation of *seeking first the kingdom of God;* but since it follows hence, that all transgressors against this duty cannot but

be out of the way of salvation, it will be necessary to examine, who they are that may be said to comply or not comply with it; which shall be the subject of this Entertainment.

Whoever finds in himself a strong inclination to please God in everything, and fears nothing more than to offend him, receives afflictions as coming from the hand of God, with an entire submission to him; uses the things of this world, according to the order of his providence; and is ready in his heart to part with them, rather than do any thing contrary to the principles of religion, or the dictates of conscience. Such a one may be truly said to *seek first the kingdom of God;* that is, to make the salvation of his soul the chief business of this life: And the contrary judgment must be made of those, who find not these dispositions prevailing in their hearts.

Whence it follows, *first,* That they who get a livelihood by any unlawful means, or live in any habit of mortal sin, are far from *seeking first the kingdom of God;* because their continuing wilfully in a state, which excludes them from that kingdom, is a manifest proof, that they prefer the object of some criminal passion before it. The same is to be said of those, who in their discourses preach up any custom or practice flatly condemned by the gospel, or are resolved in their hearts to conform themselves to it, if an occasion should present itself.

I speak particularly of the detestable practice of duels; which is so generally maintained by persons of both sexes, that I can scarcely remember I ever heard a laic speak against it: I have sometimes ventured to represent the foulness of it in its true colours; but it was the same as reasoning against a hurricane; and I never got anything but laughter for my pains, as if I had maintained the most ridiculous paradox in the world.

Nobody indeed pretends to say in express terms, that duelling is no sin; because the very first principles of religion would give him the lie: but, whether sin or no sin, most discourses I have heard upon this subject tended to make it appear a thing so *necessary* and *indispensable,* that whoever should scruple it, on certain occasions, was set forth as a man of lost honour, and as unfit to shew his head; as one branded with the infamy of cowardice. Thus an abhorrence of murder, or not venturing to leap headlong

into hell-fire, is represented as cowardice; and imitating the *patience* and *humility of Jesus Christ*, has a mark of infamy set upon it in these unchristian discourses.

In effect, if such discourses be not highly criminal, christianity is a jest; the gospels ought to be burnt, and the four Evangelists condemned, as authors of a morality that renders men infamous, and unworthy to be reckoned among men of honour: But why is not the fifth Commandment, *Thou shalt not murder*, struck out of the decalogue? It is certainly unjust, if duelling may be lawfully encouraged: nay, why is an infamous death its punishment even by all human laws? For can it enter into the thoughts of a man of sense, that an infamous punishment should be the just reward of an action, that is not only honourable, but is indispensable and necessary? It is therefore manifest, that nothing but the instigation of the devil can make men stand up in defence of a practice which has all laws, both human and divine, against it: The law of God forbids it; the gospel condemns it; the law of nature cries out against it; the civil law punishes it as an infamous crime; and the laws of the Church express their abhorrence of it, by excommunicating the parties concerned, and denying christian burial to the unhappy victims of it. A cause must certainly be very infamous, to lie under so many heavy condemnations!

But it is foreign from my purpose to enter any farther into the nature of it, or unmask its whole deformity; my only business is to shew, that they who are disposed in their hearts to conform themselves to this mad custom of the world, are not in the number of those who *seek first the kingdom of God*, or make their salvation their chief concern; since they are disposed to prefer the esteem of men, nay, of fools and madmen, before God's favour: their hearts are therefore criminal, though their hands remain innocent: and they who encourage them to it by their discourses, are accomplices with them in their crime.

But I shall now turn my discourse to another sort of worldly persons: Those I mean, who express indeed an abhorrence of all vice, yet pass their lives in a kind of regular circle of unprofitable amusements, or what the world calls innocent divertisements and pleasures; and the question is, whether these persons may be said to make their salvation their *chief business*.

I will first answer it, by proposing another of the same nature, viz. Whether a steward, or any other servant that should daily spend the best part of his time in diverting himself, may, with any colour of truth, be said to apply himself chiefly to his master's business? The two cases seem to be exactly parallel; and if men's judgments were as unbiassed in things relating to their salvation, as they are in reference to their temporal concerns, I cannot doubt but the case of the *idle christian* would appear full as bad as that of the *idle servant.*

But, to give a direct answer to it, I shall lay down a principle, which appears to be self-evident, viz. *Whoever leads a life made up of such actions, as are no ways referable to Almighty God, cannot in any measure be said to make his salvation his chief business;* because, since nothing is conducive to salvation but what is *referable to God,* it follows, that all such actions, as are not referable to him, are not *conducive to salvation:* And by consequence a person, who leads a course of life chiefly made up of such actions, cannot be said to make his salvation his *chief business;* for that alone can be called a man's chief business, in order to which his time is chiefly employed, and at which his actions chiefly aim.

Now then let us confront a life of pleasure with the principle I have laid down, and see whether it can stand the test. Can any man without intending to mock God, make an offering to him of an idle and unprofitable life? Can he have the confidence to tell him, it is for his sake he daily spends the greatest part of his time in passing from one diversion to another? That it is for love of him he daily studies to gratify his own inclinations and humour?—Finally, that it is in compliance with his holy will he leads a life of ease, of idleness, and pleasures? I scarcely can think a person, that has any sense of conscience or religion, dare, with a serious reflection, use this language to Almighty God, or make him an offering of such a course of life.

If you ask, how is it possible, that a person supposed to be free from vice, should be out of the way of salvation? I answer it is very possible; because he may be guilty of *mortal sin,* though he be free from what the world usually calls *vice;* and every mortal sin is an obstacle to salvation. Thus Lucifer and his angels were condemned, without being guilty of that sort of vice; the Pharisees were con-

demned by Christ, though he never accused them of any gross vice; the *five foolish virgins*, though virgins, were excluded from the marriage feast, because they had not their *lamps trimmed;* and the *slothful servant* stands recorded as condemned in the gospel, though he was only convicted of not having improved his master's talent: Whence it follows, that there are many sins, besides those the world calls *vice*, which will exclude us from the kingdom of God: For there are mortal sins of *omission*, as well as *commission;* there are mortal sins of *thought*, as well as *deed;* and *pride* and *sloth*, which are in the number of *capital sins*, may become as mortal as *luxury* and *intemperance*.

The only question then is, what those who live idly, and chiefly study their pleasures, are guilty of? I answer their most remarkable sin is *sloth;* which consists chiefly in a gross and supine neglect of their soul's salvation. Their sin is their being their own *idols*, and seeking to please themselves more than Almighty God. Finally, their sin is their leading a life irreconcileable with the sacred maxims of the gospel.

I shall quote some few, pronounced by Christ, to shew I am not guilty of exaggeration. *The way* (says Christ) *that leads to life is narrow—Unless ye do penance, ye shall all perish.—He that takes not up his cross and follows me, is not worthy of me.—Strive to enter by the narrow gate.—Be watchful and pray, that you enter not into temptation.* And how does a life of idleness and pleasures agree with these sacred maxims? Can it be called the *narrow way?* Is it a life of *penance?* Is it the way of the *Cross?* Is it *following Christ?* Is it entering by the *narrow gate?* Finally, is it a life of *watchfulness* and *prayer?* The contrary is so evident, that to go about to prove it would be labouring rather to obscure than clear the truth. We need not then be long in searching out the sin they are guilty of. It shews itself plainly to those that will but open their eyes to see it.

However, I cannot but observe, that the supposition of their keeping within the bounds of everything that is lawful in itself seems somewhat speculative, and is scarcely to be found in practice. The reason is, because since even those who apply themselves to the practice of penitential works, are not free from dangerous temptations, and have difficulty enough to resist vice; it seems very extraordinary that they,

who chiefly study their pleasures, should keep wholly free from it: and therefore it appears far more probable, that the same root of self-love, and the same principle of not denying themselves anything they have a mind to, within the bounds of what seems lawful, will by degrees become as prevalent upon them, in relation to pleasures of another kind, when they present themselves: especially if we consider, that there appears nothing in their lives to entitle them to those assisting graces, without which corrupt nature will easily be overcome by the frequent allurements and assaults of vice: and so we may conclude without danger of rash judgment, that a life without rule or order, a life of idleness and pleasures, finally, a life of humour and inclination, attended with a great neglect of prayer and the sacraments, will not keep long from being concerned in something more than what falls within the reputed limits of innocent and lawful.

There remains but one point more to be cleared, with which I shall end, viz. how persons, who employ the most considerable part of their time in worldly concerns, as many are necessitated to do, may be said to make their salvation their chief business? In answer to it, I may lay down a *second* undoubted maxim, viz. *That whatsoever is referable to God may be rendered conducive to salvation.* Now of this nature are all temporal employments; that is the duties of any honest and lawful calling, wherein men are engaged by the order of Divine Providence: for since the government of the world is put immediately into the hands of men, it is the order of God that every one should be faithful in performing the duties of the station wherein he has placed him. So that, though *temporal* and *spiritual*, that is, the concerns of this life and those of the life to come, seem very opposite to one another, yet the *temporal* may be made subservient to the *spiritual*, and the concerns of this life to those of the next, by being offered up, *first*, in conformity to the will of God; and *secondly*, in the spirit of penance: because all duties whatever, being a restraint upon our inclinations, which naturally carry us to liberty and ease, they may all be put into the number of penitential works, and rendered such in effect by a sincere oblation of the heart. Whence it plainly follows, that, though the most considerable part of a man's time be employed in worldly concerns, he may nevertheless be said to make his salvation his chief business, provided his labours be attended with the disposi-

tion I have mentioned, and no essential duty of a Christian life be neglected.

This caution is very necessary; because though temporal employments be not, of their own nature, a hindrance to salvation, they may be rendered so by an over-solicitude, or a neglect of duties commanded; for a man may be too busy as well as too lazy to save his soul; and there are many, who instead of making their temporal employments instrumental to their salvation, sacrifice their salvation to their temporal employments: their hearts are so taken up with the cares and solicitudes of this life, that Almighty God and the concerns of their future state can scarcely find any room in their thoughts: and by this mismanagement their souls are insensibly starved, for want of sufficient nourishment of prayer, and the sacraments, so indispensably necessary to support their spiritual life and health: whereas, if they took this seriously to heart, they might easily contrive matters so, that neither the spiritual nor temporal should be neglected. For as no pretence of business can hinder them from daily nourishing the body, or providing for its cure when it is indisposed, so ought it not to hinder them from daily affording a sufficient nourishment of prayer to the soul, nor from taking timely care of its cure, when it labours under any spiritual distemper.

I shall conclude with repeating once more the words of my text, *seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God.* A Christian, to speak properly, has no other business in this world than that of saving his soul; because it is for that alone God has bestowed life upon him; and all other concerns ought to be subordinate, and made instrumental to it: and therefore our Saviour calls it *the only necessary thing;* because it is alone of indispensable necessity. *What will it avail a man,* (says Christ,) *if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?* What will it indeed avail us to have abounded in wealth, if, after the short course of this life, we fall into everlasting misery and want? What will it avail us to have enjoyed all the pleasures of this world, if we be hereafter condemned to everlasting torments? What will it avail us to have gratified our inclinations, indulged our senses, and led an easy and merry life for some years, if, after that short term of time, we begin a painful and unhappy eternity?

But how unfortunate are those poor wretches, who take

a great deal of pains in this world, perhaps to lose their souls in the next? They lead a toilsome and laborious life, groan under continual cares and solicitudes, and endure great hardships and fatigues; yet all the while, by the neglect of some easy duties, which would be a mean to sanctify all their works, gain nothing in order to a happy eternity; so that all their toil and labour, though penitential in itself, and capable of being made a mean to obtain life everlasting, if it were sincerely offered up in the spirit of penance, and in conformity to the will of God, remains fruitless for want of this holy disposition; and is like a treasure locked up, which lies dead, and turns to no account to its owner: whereas, if they laboured for God at the same time that they laboured for bread, their pains would be rewarded with everlasting joys.

THIRTY-FIFTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE DANGER OF THE WORLD, AND NECESSITY OF BEING ARMED AGAINST IT.

We know that we are of God, and the whole world is seated in wickedness. 1 John v. 19.

The general corruption of the world is the great source of sin, and a powerful incentive to it. That therefore we may be made sensible of the great necessity of being strongly guarded against it, (for which I shall give some directions in my next discourse,) the subject of this Entertainment shall be, to represent the danger to which we are exposed, of being tainted with the spirit of the world, and the obligation arising from it to arm ourselves against the danger.

If the love of the world were a harmless or indifferent thing, there could be no danger in conversing with it: but our very baptismal vows, by which we have renounced the *world*, the *flesh*, and the *devil*, are demonstrative proof that the *world* is one of the three capital enemies of God and our souls, against which we are bound to fight as long as we live: but though we were not under the obligation of these vows, both Christ and his apostles have pronounced so peremptorily against the *world*, and the lovers of it, that it is impossible to espouse their cause without declaring ourselves enemies to Christ, and his doctrine.

Let us first hear Christ himself speak: he tells us, *First*,

the world hates him, John xv. 18. *Secondly*, That *it neither sees, nor knows, nor can receive the spirit of truth*, John xiv. 17. *Thirdly*, That *its works are evil*, John vii. 7. And *Fourthly*, That *as the world has hated him, so will it also hate his disciples, because they are not of the world, but he has chosen them out of the world*, John xv. 19.

Thus is the world stigmatised by Christ; nor are the apostles more favourable to it. Hear then what character they give of it. *Be not conformed to this world*, (says St. Paul,) Rom. xii. 2. St. James seconds him in this matter. *Know ye not that the friendship of this world is the enemy of God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of this world, becometh an enemy of God.* James iv. 4. And St. John is no less severe upon it. *The whole world is seated in wickedness*, 1 John v. 19. And again, *if any man* (says he) *love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him: for all that is in the world, is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life, which is not of the Father, but is of the world.* 1 John ii. 15, 16.

You must own these texts are very frightful, if we consider how a great number of worldly Christians are flatly condemned by them: for it is impossible to read them, and not be convinced that the love of the world is a mortal poison to the soul, as being inconsistent with the love of God, that is, with a condition essentially necessary to salvation.

It remains then only to consider the danger to which we live exposed, of being ourselves infected with this poison. This danger proceeds principally from our being under a necessity of keeping company with those, who are already more or less tainted with it. For it is by the mutual intercourse of *seeing*, *hearing*, and *discoursing*, that all our ideas, nay, even inclinations, whether good or bad, are in some measure formed; though with this remarkable difference, that the influence of bad company is usually more prevalent than that of good; because virtue meets an opposition and vice a conformity in our nature; so that, as bodies which are unsound and full of bad humours are apt to take any sort of infection; so our nature, corrupted by original sin, and of itself prone to evil, easily sucks in the spiritual distempers of those with whom we converse: and therefore it is no wonder, that by daily *hearing the discourse*, and *seeing the example* of persons, whose heads and hearts are full of the world, we should be in danger of being influenced

by them in our principles, as well as practice, and be insensibly drawn into the easy broad way of the world, which leads to everlasting perdition.

First then, as to the danger of their discourse, it is a known truth, that *the mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart:* and therefore, as lungs that are tainted cannot but cause a foul breath, so a heart tainted with the love of the world, will naturally produce discourses suitable to that passion. Consider but what subjects the entertainments of the world usually run upon: has God Almighty any share in them? Do they ever put us in mind of the concerns of eternity? Alas, to set on foot a discourse of piety in any public assembly, is become as great a trespass against good manners, as to affect to speak a language the company does not understand: Nay, the very design of worldly conversation, is what we call to *divert;* that is, to draw the mind from the thought of every thing that is serious, and amuse it with such objects as are most agreeable to corrupt nature; so that the greatest part of worldly assemblies is composed of persons, who meet together for no other end than to entertain one another with something relating to that object, which takes up the chief place in their affections: each one being most delighted in setting off the idol of his own prevailing passion, whether it be honours, riches, or pleasures, or whatever the thing be to which he is most inclined by nature: and as it is their love and esteem of these things that make them take a pleasure in discoursing of them, so it gives them a certain natural eloquence, to set them off to the best advantage, and at the same time to inspire others with the same esteem and love of them: for all discourses of this nature are properly the language of men's passions; and as they are prompted by their passions, so they serve only to enkindle them in others. It is by these, and other such like entertainments, we inflame each other with the love of the world: it is by these we foment and nourish our corrupt inclinations, encourage pride and vanity, and insensibly work up men's hearts into such a value and esteem of earthly things, as at last may prove mortal poison to the soul.

The reason hereof is very plain; because we need no other sin, to lose our souls for ever, than to love anything in this world so, as in our hearts to prefer the possession of it before the friendship of Almighty God: It is true, it

often happens that we know not how deep a root the love of the things of this world has already taken in our hearts; because, for want of occasion, we have not yet been put to the proof, whether God or those things be dearer to us: but whether we do, or do not know it, it is very certain, that naturally speaking, nothing contributes more to heighten our esteem and love of anything, than to hear it continually praised and admired by those who daily converse withal: and since it is likewise evident, that the greater esteem and love we have for anything, the more unwilling we are to part with it; it follows, that our affection to the things of this world may be insensibly heightened to such a degree, that when by any trial we are put to the choice to renounce either of them, or the grace and friendship of Almighty God, the world may be grown too hard for our duty; and it happens but too often in the unfortunate examples of those who renounce their religion to save their estates, or to attain some preferment at court: for it is plain that the love of the world prevails in their hearts, and determines them to that unhappy choice with the utter ruin of their souls.

However, though the *language* of the world be so very dangerous, as I have shewn, its *example* carries much more danger with it; for words would, in some measure lose their force, were they not seconded by a suitable practice: But the children of this world speak more effectually by their deeds than with their tongues, and shew evidently, from the unequal distribution of their solicitude, time, and expense, between the concerns of this life and the other, where their heart and treasure lie. Now, is there anything more catching than a general example, especially when it favours our natural inclinations? Is there anything influences our judgments, and by consequence our wills, more powerfully, than the constant practice of those we converse with?

I need but offer one familiar instance to convince you of this truth: that which makes so great a noise in the world, and is called the *mode*, is nothing but the general example of some town or country, which is so irresistibly prevalent, that it seems to drag men to a certain necessity of compliance; for let a thing be ever so inconvenient, expensive, or even so absurd in itself, if it be the *mode*, if it be the custom and practice of others, and generally authorized by example, it is almost in vain to speak against it, and very few

have the courage not to conform themselves to it; insomuch that it is become a common proverb, That a man had as well be out of the world, as out of the fashion: and pray consider, whether any mode be more general, than to live according to the spirit and maxims of the world; or whether there be anything more antiquated and worn out of fashion, than to live up to the sacred maxims of the gospel? For alas! how few are there, even of those that are not noted for any scandalous irregularities, whose lives may be said to have a conformity to the faith they profess? What proof do they give that Heaven is their principal concern, and salvation the chief business of their lives? They say, indeed, they love God above all things, but their actions seem to speak another language; since their small and negligent application to the duties of religion is no great sign that their hearts and treasure are in Heaven; and their spending the largest part of their time in studying their divertisements and pleasures, is but too convincing a proof, that their chief business is not to serve God, but to please themselves.

Since then we may conclude, that the world is full of danger, both in respect to *intercourse* and *example*, the two things which doubtless have a very great power over man's will, and influence upon his actions; it will now be an easy task to prove the obligation we all have to arm ourselves against it: for it appears, from what has been said, that our condition in this world is much the same as that of a person who is forced to swim for life against a rapid stream; whom therefore we should give over for lost, if he should leave off struggling against it. Our case, I say, is much the same; for the corruption of the world is as an impetuous torrent, that strives to carry all before it, and whose violence is very hard to be resisted; yet we must either resist it, or perish in it; for since our circumstances oblige us to live in the midst of this torrent, we have but one way to save ourselves, which is resolving to struggle against it, by the use of such holy exercises as are most proper to preserve us from being overcome by it.

I know it is a common error amongst worldly persons to imagine, that living up to the maxims of the gospel belongs only to religious persons, or such as are wholly retired from the world. Both St. Basil and St. Chrysostom complain, that many in their time were under this mistake; and I find the ground of it to be no other than a wrong or imper-

fect notion of christianity: for, whoever will but seriously consider what it is to be a *Christian*, and what we are obliged to precisely, by virtue of that character, will soon be convinced that there is no difference between *religious* and *laics*, as to any essential duty or virtue taught by Christ, and commanded in the gospels. *Thou deceivest thyself*, (says St. Chrysostom,) *and art grossly mistaken, if thou imaginest that one thing is required of seculars, another of monks.* The reason whereof is clear, because we can have no other notion of virtue or perfection, than what the gospel itself has marked out; and the gospel was written and published for all professions. *Dost thou think*, (says St. Basil,) *that the gospels were not also written for married persons?* And he continues thus: *Let us not doubt, but of whatever calling we be, we shall be demanded an account of it, as well as hermits and religious.*

In effect, *religious* and *laics*, considered precisely as *Christians*, are all of the same *order:* We have all made the same *vows*, viz. of renouncing the devil, with all his pomps and works; we have all the same *founder*, viz. Jesus Christ, from whom we take our name, and whose disciples we profess to be; we have all the same *rule* to live by, viz. the *gospel;* the same *end* to aim at, viz. *perfection;* and the same *reward* to hope for, viz. *life everlasting.* This is the great order of *christianity;* and, beyond all dispute, the noblest that was ever instituted; whether we consider the dignity of its founder, the holiness of its rule, the purity of its doctrine, the sublimeness of its end, or, finally, the number and illustrious characters of the persons enrolled in it: the greatest monarchs upon earth glory in being not only members, but protectors of this holy order: and are as much obliged to observe all its rules as those who live in cloisters, and are wholly sequestered from the world.

Whence it follows, that there is not any virtue commanded by the gospel, which all are not bound to aspire to, as well as the most rigid monks. All have the same obligation to *love God above all things, and their neighbour as themselves:* To have their hearts disengaged from the love of the world; to use violence to their inclinations, and do penance for their sins; finally, to be *humble, meek, penitent*, and resigned in all things to the will of God. Are not all men equally concerned in these maxims delivered by Christ: *Whoever will be my disciple, let him deny himself,*

take up his cross, and follow me. Whoever loves his father, or mother, son or daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me. Whoever takes not up his cross, and follows me, is not worthy of me. I have set you an example, that you may also do as I have done. Were not the following instructions addressed to all? *Be watchful, for ye know not the day nor hour.—Seek first the kingdom of God.—Unless you do penance, ye shall likewise all perish.* And is it not then plain what St. Basil teaches, that all will be judged by these maxims in the great day of accounts? If so, then all are equally bound to make them the rule of their lives; and in this respect there is no difference between *religious* and *seculars*, the *clergy* and *laity*, since these are *Christians* as well as the other; that is, disciples of the same crucified Christ, marked with the same spiritual character, members under the same head, redeemed with the same precious blood, and tending to the self-same end.

This then being an undoubted truth, viz. that living in the world exempts no man from any duty of a christian life. I leave every one to judge, whether persons engaged in this state can pretend to comply with the obligation incumbent on them, without daily arming themselves against the dangers and temptations to which they live exposed; they are all bound to live according to the spirit of the gospel, and that amidst a corrupt world, which by the allurement of its discourse and example, is a continual snare to them: they are therefore bound of course to employ such means as are proportioned to the task they have upon their hands, and the difficulties that attend it.

It is true they are not tied down to the same means as persons engaged in a religious state; because, though they be excellent in themselves, they are not suitable to all conditions. However, since as *Christians* they are bound to have the self-same end in view, whatever means they make choice of, they must be such as will answer the end they aim at. Nay, as their dangers and temptations are greater, their watchfulness to secure themselves ought to be so too. Persons shut up in cloisters are, as it were in a safe harbour; but they who live in the world are in the midst of a tempestuous sea. Religious are as an army strongly intrenched, with the particular laws and constitutions of their order; but laics are in the open field, encompassed with many enemies: and therefore, next after the protection of

Almighty God, on whose assisting grace they must depend in every thing, they have nothing but their own watchfulness and spiritual arms to trust to. So that the obligation of keeping a strict guard upon themselves, and being always in a posture of defence, is rather more pressing upon these than the other. Because all are equally bound to conquer, and laics have at least one very dangerous enemy upon their hands more than religious, viz. the *world*, which they must overcome, as well as the other enemies of their salvation.

THIRTY-SIXTH ENTERTAINMENT.

MEANS TO PRESERVE US FROM THE CORRUPTION OF THE WORLD.

This is the victory which overcometh the world. 1 John v. 4.

THE danger of the world, and the necessity of being strongly fortified against it, have been fully represented in my last discourse. I presume then it will not be unacceptable to have some directions how this is to be done; which shall be the subject of this Entertainment.

Suppose it were our misfortune to live in a town infected with the plague, and that our temporal concerns would not permit us to remove from it; let us consider seriously what we should do in that case, to preserve ourselves from catching the distemper: for if we have but the same solicitude, and use the same precautions, to secure ourselves against the corruption of the world, as we would do to avoid the plague, we may with the help of God's grace, live as untainted in the world as Lot did in the midst of Sodom.

First then, in the case supposed, it is certain we should endeavour to keep at the greatest distance possible from all persons and houses infected with it. *Secondly*, if there were a good wholesome air upon any neighbouring hill, we should walk thither for health, as often as our domestic affairs would permit us. And *Thirdly*, we should not neglect the use of antidotes or preservatives, recommended by the ablest physicians. These, doubtless, are the precautions all rational men would make use of for their security in the case supposed, and may therefore serve to direct all Christians what they must do to save their souls, amidst the general contagion of the world.

In the first place, therefore, there are certain persons infected in a more notorious degree than others, whose company is to be avoided as much as possible: I principally mean professed libertines, and such as in their discourse affect to make a jest of religion, and turn its most sacred maxims into ridicule. These are the very rankest bane and poison of souls in conversation; and it is without dispute, that of all sorts of unchristian discourses, *profaneness* is the most pernicious and destructive to piety and virtue: *first*, because it strikes at the very root of all christian morality; and *secondly*, because it does it in the most effectual manner possible, viz. by way of raillery and banter; which being a diversion to the company, is usually listened to with pleasure, and therefore makes a deeper and more lasting impression. It is by this profane buffoonery that morality is brought into contempt, that men are made ashamed to speak and act like christians; and many, who would not easily have been seduced any other way, have been laughed out of all principle of religion.

These persons therefore are to be avoided as the plague. *The poison of asps is under their lips.* Psalm xiii. 4. *The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity.* James iii. 6. For they are not content barely to preach up the world, but labour to do the devil's work for him a shorter way. Their profession is to run down christianity, to set up atheism, and turn religion out of doors.

But as the company of these profane scoffers and deriders of religion is manifestly dangerous, so there are also certain *places*, where the spirit of the world reigns much more absolutely than elsewhere, and are therefore more contagious, especially if they be much frequented. Amongst these, the *theatre* has a mark set upon it by all spiritual writers, for it is there the world appears in its greatest pomp, and dressed up in all its most tempting allurements; it is there men's eyes and ears are entertained with objects most agreeable to flesh and blood; it is there, in fine, our natural passions are not only flattered, but heightened and inflamed to a very great degree. *Love*, the most dangerous and violent of passions, reigns upon the stage, and is its principal support. *Ambition* and *revenge* are treated with honour, rewarded with success, and set forth, in most tragedies, as accomplishments necessary to make a great man: And as for characters represented in comedies, even those

that are counted perfect, and proposed as patterns for imitation, have usually a mixture of such qualities, as would flatly damn a man if he were found guilty of them at the hour of death.

However, I will not pretend to assure positively, that it is unlawful ever to go to a play: I will only lay down some maxims which can admit of no dispute. *First*, All those who find by experience, that going to plays is to them an immediate occasion of sin, or at least a great incentive to it, are bound in conscience to deprive themselves wholly of that diversion. *Secondly*, when the language, design, or representation of any play is notoriously immodest, it is unlawful to be present at it; because the danger in that case is manifest; and *he that loves danger shall perish in it.* Whence it follows. *Thirdly*, that to take the chance of a play, without being any ways informed of its character, is to run the hazard of offending God mortally. And *Fourthly*, that those who make a custom of going indifferently to all, may judge positively of themselves, that an innocent diversion is not the chief motive of their going.

But the surest rule, and which nobody can call in question, is, that the less all places of public spectacles are frequented, the better it is, because the safer: which is reason enough in any case wherein the life or health of our bodies is concerned: for then no man amuses himself with examining how great or little the danger of infection is in such or such companies or places; but if any danger at all be reasonably suspected, there needs no more to determine any man to avoid them as much as possible. If then our souls were as dear to us as our bodies, we should act upon the same principle, and by the same rule, in all cases in which our spiritual life or health is in any measure concerned. Instead of examining nicely the degrees of danger, our sole care would be to inform ourselves impartially, whether there were any at all; and if any were discovered, we should take the same measures for the safety of our souls, as we do for that of our bodies. If this rule were observed, all public spectacles, which no man doubts but are attended with some degree of danger, would be as little frequented, as houses that are cried down for being haunted with evil spirits, or infected with a contagious air.

However, it is not enough to avoid all companies and places where the danger is greatest; because all worldly

conversation is attended with danger enough, to oblige all Christians to be upon their guard, and use means to fortify themselves against it; and therefore we must also have recourse to the second sort of precaution, which we should make use of in case we lived in a town infected with a pestilential distemper. For, as in that case, we should be glad, as often as we could to walk up to some neighbouring hill, to breathe a purer air; so we must do in a spiritual manner for the health of our souls. We must go, as often as we can, to the mountain of prayer, there to converse for some time with Almighty God, and let our souls breathe a better air, than the necessity of our affairs will permit them to do at other times.

This directs us to a duty of great importance; I mean our morning and evening devotions; which ought never to be omitted unless some indispensable business renders them impracticable; and then they may be supplied by something equivalent, if care be taken; as frequent elevations of the heart to God, or short ejaculatory prayers, of which we ought to have a constant provision, and which hinder no business.

The main point is to have a true zeal, and hearty good will; for these never want time nor opportunity to serve God, according to every one's respective state or condition: whereas cold and slothful christians can seldom find any, even when they have more time lying upon their hands than they know how to dispose of; and then what wonder is it, that the world should grow prevalent in their hearts, since they do nothing to hinder it from working its whole effect upon them? Whereas a daily communication with God, by morning and evening prayer, would be a powerful counterpoise against it; supposing withal that there be no notorious neglect in the devotions of Sundays and holidays; which being days of vacation from temporal business, and set apart for God's service, afford opportunity for all sorts of spiritual exercises that are proper to season the soul against the contagious air of the world: and it is incredible how much they would contribute to this end, if they were constantly employed as they ought to be, according to the intention of the Church. But if, on the contrary, they be made days of vacation from spiritual as well as temporal concerns, and consecrated to idleness, the mother of all vice, truly I cannot well imagine how persons in the world

will save their souls, since by this abuse, their time is not only almost wholly divided between their business and pleasures, but God is generally most offended on those very days, on which it ought to be their principal endeavour to obtain such a stock of grace, for the rest of the week, as with the additional aid of morning and evening prayer, might suffice to strengthen them both against worldly infection, and other temptations to which they live exposed.

The third and last sort of means to be made use of against the contagion of the world, are those I call *antidotes*, or *preservatives;* of which there are two principally recommended by all directors; namely, *spiritual reading*, and the *sacraments*. As to the first it were to be heartily wished, that not only a part of all Sundays and holidays, but at least a small half hour were daily employed in this holy exercise. The task is not great, and the advantage of it will be very considerable: *First*, because it will supply the want of public instruction, for which there is but little opportunity in our circumstances. And *secondly*, because, if performed with attention, it will also in some measure supply the want of mental prayer; which, though highly recommendable, is, through mistake and want of use, regarded as so difficult a thing by those who live in the world, that few apply themselves to it; though St. Francis of Sales, in his *Introduction to a devout Life*, recommends it to all Christians in general, and has set down an easy method for the successful performance of it.

But to return to my subject, and shew why I call the exercise of reading an *antidote* and *preservative* against the infection of the world: the reason is very plain; because a constant use of it will season our souls with a doctrine directly opposite to the maxims preached up by the world; it will instruct us in all the duties of a christian; it will frequently put us in mind of the shortness and uncertainty of this life; and that there is an eternity to come, in which we must be either infinitely happy or unhappy; this will wean us insensibly from the love of the world, by convincing us of the vanity of its pomps, the folly and poisons of its maxims, and the emptiness of all its pleasures: it will render sin odious, and virtue amiable, and encourage us to the practice of it, by the example of so many saints who are already gone before us: finally, it will nourish the spirit of

prayer, enkindle devotion, excite us to compunction, discover all the snares of the devil, and direct us how to avoid them.

And are not these most excellent preservatives against the love of the world? Is not all this very well worth the trouble of a short half hour's reading every day? We shall certainly find it so, and have no reason to regret the small confinement it will oblige us to. Even all religious orders, though separated from the world, are, by their constitutions, obliged to this exercise; because it is an universal remedy for all spiritual distempers: it fortifies piety in those that have it, and warms those into it that have it not; as is manifest from the innumerable examples of those, who have owed their entire conversion even to the casual reading of some pious book, and became afterwards as eminent saints, as they had been remarkable before for the irregularity of their lives.

But the most sovereign *antidote*, or *preservative*, against the corruption of the world, and indeed against all sinful suggestions of our spiritual enemies, is the sacrament of the holy *Eucharist*, prepared by Christ himself for this end.—Oh, if we took but care to prepare ourselves with the greatest devotion we are able, for this holy banquet, what grace, what strength would it communicate to us! since Christ himself has assured us, that *he who eats this bread shall live for ever:* because, if he eats worthily, he has the very source of grace and fountain of life remaining in him: and is he not sufficiently out of the reach of danger, who has Christ himself for a safeguard? We must therefore acknowledge, in a literal sense, what David spoke prophetically, *Thou hast prepared a table for me against all who afflict me;* that is, a food to strengthen us against all the enemies of our souls; of which if we eat, without obstructing the operation of its virtue by any wilful neglect, we may then pronounce with a confident assurance, *Though I shall walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I shall not fear evil, because thou art with me.*

If any one asks how often the holy Eucharist ought to be received, I answer, if it be received worthily, the oftener the better; if unworthily, the oftener the worse: because, as worthy communions are never without fruit, and increase of spiritual strength, so nothing hardens the heart more against the inspirations of divine grace than unworthy com-

munions. However, since it is to be supposed that no christian, who has any sense of his duty, will approach the blessed sacrament, wittingly and knowingly, with a conscience charged with mortal sin, the general rule for persons living in the commerce of the world is, to communicate at least once a month, and on the most solemn feasts of the Church. For those who perform this duty seldomer, defer it for the most part either through sloth, because they will not take the pains to prepare themselves for it; or upon the account of some sinful habit, which they will not resolve to quit: but whatever the cause may be, the consequence is very dangerous.

We see then what we must do, arm ourselves against the corruptions of the world. I have proposed nothing beyond the very common duties of christian life; but these common duties, if well and constantly performed, will have a wonderful effect both on our hearts and actions; whereas, they who neglect them are, for the most part, sooner or later noted for some remarkable irregularity, or scandalous disorder in their lives.

We must consider, that the number of those who perish in the world is very great; and though we be not allowed to judge of any one in particular, unless their be incontestible signs of his reprobation, yet it is undoubted truth, because Christ himself has declared it. But how comes it that so many perish? For it is this we must chiefly consider, that by discovering the rock upon which they have suffered shipwreck, we may be precautioned to avoid it; how comes it then, I say, that so many perish in the world? Do they want the necessary means of salvation? Would they lose their souls, if they were careful to employ the means God's providence had furnished them with to save them? Would God be wanting to them, if they were not wanting to themselves? It is impious to say it. The reason therefore why so many perish is, because the world is full of danger, and yet the greatest part of christians live in the same supine neglect, as if there were no danger at all.

Suppose that in a town infected with the plague, the greatest part of its inhabitants should not only expose themselves to all manner of danger without necessity, but wholly neglect all remedies prescribed in that case, would not the natural consequence of this mad proceeding be, that very

great numbers would catch the infection and die of it? If therefore christians, who live in the midst of a corrupt world, will neither take care to keep themselves out of the reach of such dangers as may be avoided, nor arm themselves against those that cannot be avoided; if Sundays and holidays be made days of idleness or pleasure, instead of devotion, and the rest of the week be employed in temporal concerns or divertisements, which draw the heart from God; finally, if both prayer and spiritual reading, and the use of the sacraments, be almost wholly neglected, must not the same consequences as naturally follow, viz. that very great numbers will perish eternally, because they will not employ the ordinary means to save their souls?—It cannot naturally be otherwise; for we cannot expect that God will assist us, unless we perform our part, by employing the means he has provided us with; which if we do, he will enable us to conquer the world, and triumph over all our spiritual enemies.

THIRTY-SEVENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE EMPTINESS AND VANITY OF THE WORLD.

Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity. Eccl. i. 2.

Some worldly good, whether real or supposed, is aimed at in all the cravings of men's passions; and there is no sin committed, but the unlawful enjoyment, either of *honour*, *wealth*, or *pleasure*, is the principal incitement to it: It is for these men forfeit God's grace, and damn themselves; though the very choicest of them are so despicable in themselves, that the word of God itself has proclaimed their emptiness and vanity. The serious consideration of this truth will help to fortify the antidotes I have already prescribed against the love of the world, and shall therefore be the subject of this Entertainment.

All worldly goods may be reduced under the general heads of *pleasure*, *greatness*, *esteem*, and *riches*: Now there are three general circumstances, which render the satisfaction they procure us *vain*, and, by consequence, worthy of contempt: 1. They are mixed: 2. Their duration is short; and 3. They usually end in everlasting sorrow.

To instance first, in the most general idol of men's passions, and which they usually pursue with the greatest

eagerness, I mean *pleasures;* they either pass away quickly, and then they signify nothing, but serve only to inflame the desire they ought to have satisfied; or they stay long with us, and then they grow tedious, and we are sick of them: So that they either overcharge the appetite, or leave it empty; and the satisfaction they procure us is sure to delude us one way or other.

Besides, we may consider pleasure either as lawful or unlawful in itself; for take it what way you please it has a mixture which lessens in some measure the relish of it: If it be lawful in its particular kind, it is still dangerous in its general nature, as being apt to engage the heart too far in its interest; and then what is lawful in itself, may become criminal in its excess, proportionably to the strength of our inclination to it: So that the use even of lawful pleasures is clogged and encumbered with so many restraints and precautions, as to destroy a great part of the satisfaction we seek in the pursuit of them.

But if they be unlawful in their very nature, *disquiet* and *remorse* of conscience, the natural fruit of vice, is a wormwood which embitters the very sweetest draught of pleasure: nay, the bare foresight of the punishment that is to follow, disturbs the pleasure in the very enjoyment; and when that is over, shame and remorse, like ministers of justice, rush in upon the offender, and make him pay very dear for the short-lived pleasure he has enjoyed. This is the nature of worldly pleasures; and the few hints I have given shew plainly, that under whatever circumstance they are considered, they can yield no satisfaction but what is mixed with disappointment and affliction of spirit.

Greatness, the second idol of the world, is in itself but an empty name: and the power and authority annexed to it is a real burden, which often crushes those whom it has raised: for the higher men are in their station, the fairer mark they are for envy and malice to shoot at: if they discharge their trust as they ought, their life is encumbered with cares, and their condition is but an honourable slavery: If they neglect or abuse it, they are sure to be exposed; and their infamy becomes as public as their station: so that, considering the condition of men in power with an impartial eye, and weighing the burden against the advantage, we may truly say they commonly pay dear enough for their greatness: and whatever secret satisfaction it may bring

with it, it is mixed with so great an alloy, that they who enjoy it can never be envied by any thinking man, and have but little reason to be over-fond of their condition.

Esteem, the other darling of human pride, is to the full as vain, and no less mixed than the former; it consists in the favourable opinion men have of us; and is there any thing so empty and precarious, so inconsistent and capricious, as the opinion of men? They who love and esteem us to-day, will perhaps hate and despise us to-morrow: a false report, a casual indiscretion, a mere groundless fancy, suffices to rob us in an instant of all the esteem we have been labouring to acquire for many years.

But suppose this should not happen, what can the opinion of men avail us? For since opinion is nothing but a thought shut up within the breasts of men, it is wholly unknown to us, and can yield us no satisfaction, but when it is manifested by some outward token; and how little are those outward tokens to be depended upon, since they are much oftener an effect of flattery or dissimulation, than marks of real esteem.

Add to this, that since esteem consists precisely in the favourable thoughts of judgment men have of us, it follows, that when they cease thinking of us, their esteem is, as it were suspended all that time; and, in reality, affects us no longer than whilst we are actually present to their thoughts: and how seldom does that happen? men, alas! are too much taken up with themselves, and their own concerns, to apply themselves with any lasting attention, to consider the merit or good qualities of their neighbour: nay, since no man is free from some defect, it is ten to one, that every defect shall be uppermost in their thoughts, and stifle the remembrance of all the good qualities we possess.

But let us set this favourite idol of corrupt nature in the very best light it will bear; let us suppose the good opinion men have of us to be subject to no caprice or change; nay, let us raise the value of it by all the considerations that most flatter our vanity, as the *quality*, *sound judgment*, *sincerity*, and *steadiness* of those by whom we are admired; shall we, after all, be anything the better for it? No, certainly: esteem supposes indeed some good in us, but makes no addition to it, leaving us, at best, but just where it found us; and it is happy when it does so; it is happy when we are no real losers by it: for if we are too sensibly

affected with it, our being esteemed by men may occasion our being despicable in the eyes of God; because the vanity of being esteemed may taint the heart; the purity of our intentions may be corrupted by it; we may be strongly tempted to make it our principal view; and then it must of course, destroy the whole intrinsic value of those very qualities or virtues for which we are esteemed. And is not that a most vain and empty thing, which if it be not known, can yield us no satisfaction; and if it be known, may do us a real mischief: and whether it be known or not, makes us neither wiser, more perfect, nor better men than we are without it?

Finally, *riches*, the most coveted of worldly goods, could never yet procure to any man a full and unmixed satisfaction: for they are neither kept without solicitude, nor lost without disquiet and vexation of mind. But suppose a man to be above the reach of ordinary accidents, suppose him in a quiet and secure possession of a plentiful fortune, daily experience is but too convincing a proof that happiness and riches are not always joined together; and that melancholy looks, uneasy hearts, and discontents, are to be found in the large houses of the rich, as well as in the poorest cottage. How few are there in the world, whose content increases with their wealth; or rather how few are there, whose riches are not the very occasion of their discontents?

Some, through an unaccountable unhappiness of temper, suffer all the inconveniencies of want in the midst of plenty; because, though riches come daily flowing in upon them, they have not the hearts to enjoy them: and so they have no other share in the possession of wealth than the bare incumbrance of it. Others again, though masters of a plentiful fortune, are ever uneasy, because there lives one near, who has a better estate than they; and the discontent of these is as real, as if the greater fortune of their neighbour swallowed up effectually a part of theirs: others, in fine, are ever enlarging their desires, in proportion to the increase of their wealth; and it is impossible these should ever be content; because the thing that is to make them so is always in reversion. We may then conclude from these few obvious instances, and the cheerfulness we usually observe in persons of a middle state, that riches either occasion, or at least cure not an uneasy mind: and that, by

consequence, the satisfaction they procure us is far from being pure and unmixed.

The second circumstance that renders the joys of this world truly vain, and worthy of contempt, is the shortness of their duration. To comprehend this well, we need but reflect, that there is not any one pleasure in this world, that can possibly last for any considerable space of time: for we may truly say, of all worldly pleasures, what Solomon says of riches, *that they make wings to themselves;* that is, that they are instrumental to their own destruction: because all pleasures whatsoever, by exceeding a certain limit of time, cease to be pleasures, destroy themselves, and become a torment even to the greatest lovers of them.

It is true, variety of pleasures may in some measure relieve the state, and take off some part of their tediousness. But who can pretend to pass his whole life in a continued and uninterrupted course of pleasures? Let a man study with all the art and industry imaginable to gratify his inclinations; natural indispositions on the one hand, and crossing accidents on the other, will give him frequent stops and interruptions; and by consequence his pleasures will be always considerably shorter than his life, which reflection may serve to give us a true idea of their shortness. For, alas! what is man's life? The royal Prophet compares it to a *fading flower*, fresh in the morning, and withered before night. St. James calls it a *vapour*, that rises and vanishes in a moment. And yet this fading flower, this momentary vapour is of much longer duration than the pleasures of this world can possibly be, in reference to any particular person.

For, in the first place, man's infancy is a part of life altogether incapable of pleasure. The same be also said of his decrepid years; which the Scripture call a time of *labour*, and *sorrow*, and is commonly termed a second childhood; but with this unhappy difference, that it has a perfect sense of all its miseries: so that whereas the whole course of man's life is commonly divided into four parts, to wit, his childhood, youth, middle and old age; two of the four are almost wholly incapable of pleasure. His first years pass in a total ignorance of what pleasure is, and his latter years are mostly made up of crosses and sufferings. If he dies soon, the shortness of his life permits him not to enjoy the world; and if he lives long, life itself

becomes a burden to him: so that you see the very longest course of pleasures a man can propose to himself, is already shorter than his life, by a considerable number of years.

Now as to his youth and middle age, the two parts of man's life, which alone are capable of pleasure: we must also allow for the many gaps, and make such large abatements, as will reduce the duration of his pleasures to a very narrow compass of time. Little less than one full third is commonly allowed for sleep; during which the poorest beggar is as happy as the happiest monarch in the world; or, to speak more properly, the greatest voluptuary laid on a bed of down, has no more pleasure than the beggar in his barn: for sleep is the image of death, in which all conditions are alike; or rather we are as if we were not, being under a total suspension both of pain and pleasure.

But if to this long vacancy of pleasure, which nature daily challenges, we add all casual indispositions, and a thousand accidents to which man's life is exposed; we shall find the necessary abatements to be allowod for stops and interruptions, even in the smoothest course of pleasures, will run away with so large a portion, even of that part of life which alone is capable of them; that how short soever a man's life is in itself the duration of his pleasures, though pursued with all the art and application imaginable, will not amount, in the whole, to a third part of it.

It was upon the experimental knowledge of these truths Solomon grounded that solemn declaration transmitted to us in holy writ, of the *vanity* of all earthly things: and truly, if a man was ever qualified to be a judge in any case, Solomon is one above all exception, in the point in question. He mounted his father's throne when he was very young, and possessed it to a great age: all which time passed in an uninterrupted course of the greatest prosperity. Nothing was in appearance wanting to make him not only the greatest prince, but happiest man in the world. He was both beloved and feared by his own subjects, and respected far and near as an oracle of wisdom.

Riches came flowing to him in such abundance, that during his reign, silver was no more valued than heaps of stone; and as money commands all things, so it furnished him with all the variety of pleasures his wit could invent, or passions incline him to, which he never denied anything,

but studied to indulge and gratify in all they could desire, as he writes of himself. Nor do we read that any considerable affliction or cross accident happened to him in the whole course of his reign: yet notwithstanding all this, he was so far from being satisfied with the world, that the long experience he had of its prosperity served only to convince him of its emptiness, and oblige him to proclaim to all mankind, that all its enjoyments are but *vanity and affliction of spirit.* Good God! what a poor wretched thing is this world; since with all its store of *wealth, greatness, esteem* and *pleasures*, it cannot so much as make one single man happy!

However, there remains one circumstance more, which renders all earthly joys not only worthy of contempt, but even of our hatred and aversion, to wit, that *they usually end in everlasting sorrow.* Our Saviour has delivered this truth in these express terms: *Woe be to you that laugh now, for ye shall weep:* And in the parable or relation of the different ends of Dives and Lazarus, one reason expressly alledged why the one was damned and the other saved, is because the rich glutton had enjoyed the pleasures of this life, and Lazarus had suffered great afflictions. *My son,* (says Abraham to Dives,) *remember that thou in thy lifetime didst receive good things, and Lazarus evil things: But now he is comforted, and thou art tormented:* So that the pleasures of this world, if the heart be set upon them, are but the seeds of everlasting torments: And as they *who sow in tears* have God's promise that they shall one day *reap in joy:* so they who now *sow in joy,* that is, pursue the pleasures of this world with an immoderate love, can expect no better fate than to *reap* hereafter *in tears and sorrow.*

It was the consideration of this truth kept the royal Prophet steady in his belief of an all-ruling Providence, when, as he declares, his faith was ready to stagger at the prosperity of sinners, and the sufferings of the just: For he no sooner considered their different ends, viz. the joys that crown the sufferings of the just, and the endless miseries that follow the short joys of the wicked, but his disturbed thoughts were immediately calmed, and all his doubts of God's providence fully satisfied.

However, we must not infer from thence, that temporal goods are not God's blessings, or that we ought not to be thankful for them: They are certainly his blessings, and

challenge a return of gratitude: But they are a sort of blessings which our corrupt nature makes always dangerous, and, for the most part, fatal to our souls: *First*, because they are apt to swell us with a vain conceit of ourselves: *Secondly*, because finding them agreeable, we easily set our hearts upon them, and even love them with a preference to our eternal good: And, *Thirdly*, because we usually make them the instruments of our passions, and instead of employing them to God's greater honour and glory, we use them as means to procure to ourselves those unlawful pleasures, which the divine justice is obliged to punish hereafter.

For these reasons, which are but too well grounded upon daily experience, and the common practice of mankind, our Saviour pronounced this terrible sentence, *that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven.* The same reasons drew also from him those heavy woes against the rich, which one would think should suffice to hinder any man from desiring or envying their condition. Not that the bare possession of riches renders us in any manner criminal in the sight of God; nay, if we will, we may make them very instrumental to our future happiness; particularly by distributing liberal alms amongst the poor, by employing them for the comfort of the afflicted, and finally, by making them a support of the cause and interest of religion. But this good management is so little practised in the world, and the abuse of them flows so naturally from our inbred corruption, that very few make them serve for any other purpose than to purchase for themselves those vain joys which corrupt the heart, and terminate of course in everlasting sorrow. Whence it follows, that those who have wealth ought daily to pray God to give them grace to use it well; and those who have it not, have reason to praise him for being out of the reach of a temptation, by which thousands have perished.

THIRTY-EIGHTH ENTERTAINMENT.

SOME PRACTICAL INFERENCES DRAWN FROM THE FOREGOING TRUTH.

What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul? Mark viii. 36.

HAVING in my last discourse laid before you the emptiness and vanity of worldly goods, it remains now to improve this truth, by drawing some practical consequences from it; which shall be the subject of this Entertainment.

From the two first circumstances of earthly goods, it plainly follows, that it is a great folly to set our hearts upon anything in this world. For who but a fool would engage his affections, where he is sure to meet with disappointments? And what can we else expect from things made up of a greater mixture of evil than good, and which therefore must of course give greater vexation than content?

If we ever yet had heard of any man, who owned himself perfectly satisfied in the enjoyment of this world, we should have some encouragement to hope the same. But since even those, who in all appearance were as happy as the world could make them, have ever acknowledged their dissatisfaction, and the want of something to fill up the measure of the imaginary happiness they proposed to themselves, is it not an extravagance and folly, either to promise ourselves what no man before us ever could arrive at, or set our hearts upon things, which we know beforehand will deceive us? For since content is the only end we pursue, in all our desires of worldly enjoyments; if it be evident, that they are not able to secure this to us, there appears nothing in them worth the engaging our affections; and to set our hearts upon them is to act without sense or reason.

However, let us now suppose the joys of this world could give us perfect content, at least whilst they lasted; this notwithstanding would not excuse us from being guilty of folly, in setting our hearts upon them, by reason of the shortness of their duration, and the unavoidable necessity of their ending at last in death: The reason is, because it is certainly a folly to create to ourselves an unnecessary grief and trouble. Now this is the infallible consequence of setting our hearts upon anything that will be some time or

other taken from us: For whatsoever we love and enjoy with delight, we always lose with regret; and the greatness of our pleasure in the possession, is the measure of our grief in the loss.

Whence it is, that they who have their hearts disengaged enjoy a perfect peace, which neither losses nor disappointments can destroy: nay, in relation to these, death itself loses its sting; whereas it has a double one to those, whose hearts are fast linked to the world, and their separation from it is like tearing off a limb: so that to cherish an inordinate love to anything is, in effect, to take a delight in working out the chains that are to load us, and preparing the instruments that are to torment us. *O death*, (says the wiseman,) *how bitter is thy remembrance to a man, who places his repose in the enjoyment of his wealth!* And truly it is no wonder that death should be to such a one a most bitter cup, whether he looks back upon what he is to part with, or forward upon what is to be his future lot; which to a lover of this world can be nothing else but a state of everlasting sorrow.

However, it does not follow hence but that every one is bound to use a reasonable care in the management of his temporal concerns; and in many cases he is bound to it, not only by the rules of prudence, but by the law of justice. As for instance, a person to whom an estate comes by inheritance, seems to be under a natural obligation of justice to endeavour, as far as in him lies, to leave it to his next heir as good as he found it; because his heir seems to have the same title to the reversion, as he has to the possesion of it for life; and therefore parents in this case ought to look upon themselves as trustees and guardians of their children before God, to whom they will be certainly accountable for their administration. But there is another consideration of no less weight to induce them to it: for it is a thing of the greatest importance to keep up a family, to which great numbers by the disposition of God's providence are owing for their daily bread, and which is as a common refuge and sanctuary to all the persecuted and distressed, who must all be ruined of course with the ruin of the family by which they are supported.

Now, since the very best estate may either moulder away by neglect, or be ruined by extravagance, it follows, that a reasonable care and attention is necessary for the preservation of it: and though this concern takes up a great part of

a man's thoughts, it is not what, in scripture language, is called *the love of riches*, or what I call *the setting our hearts upon them;* because it is consistent with a true christian contempt of them, which excludes not a moderate concern, but an immoderate affection for them. So that if, in a time of trial, a person is ready to sacrifice all for God's cause rather than offend him mortally, it is a manifest proof, that though his riches have a part in his thoughts, God Almighty has the first place in his heart.

It follows, *secondly*, that what has been said against the love of earthly things hinders us not from cherishing certain inclinations impressed by nature, and conformable to the order of Providence; such as the love of parents for their children, and the mutual love of married persons. These inclinations, though attended with a tenderness which seems to be a strong bias upon the heart, are not only lawful but necessary; for parents are bound to love their children, and persons engaged in the bonds of wedlock are bound to love each other; and the tenderness which naturally attends it is but a stronger cement, intended by the author of nature to render it more firm and lasting, and make the many indispensable duties annexed to their state fall in agreeably with their inclinations.

However, this love has also its bounds; for though the parents be allowed to have a tenderness for their children, and married persons to love each other above anything in this world, yet their love must take care to stop there; for if it go farther, it becomes inordinate, because the love of God admits neither of a superior nor rival: so that if any thing pretends to dispute the place with him, or preference to him, it is manifest that in this case our very tenderest inclinations must be sacrificed to our duty. It is true, the heart is divided in the case supposed, as St. Paul teaches in these words: *He that is with a wife, is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife; and he is divided.* 1 Cor. vii. 33. But the division is far from being equal: God has always a sovereign right over the whole heart, and whatever share is allowed to husband, wife, children, or any other thing of this world, it is no more than a subordinate or relative love, limited by the law of God, and bound to pay an entire obedience to all his orders.

I come now to my second inference, which I draw from the third circumstance of earthly joys, viz. *their ending in*

everlasting sorrow; and conclude from it that those, whose narrow circumstances exclude them from enjoying the pleasures of the world, or even oblige them to earn their bread with hard labour, have no reason to repine, as they usually do, at their condition; for if we judge of things by the principles of faith, we shall find their complaints and murmurs as unreasonable as the outcries of madmen, who are angry at their keepers, for taking away from them the things wherewith they would destroy themselves. I own, if there were no other world to be looked for, their circumstances would be very hard; but since this life is but a passage to a better one to come, that condition ought to be esteemed the best, which is the safest way to it: for what traveller would not prefer a safe road, before a pleasant one beset with many and almost unavoidable dangers?

Now this is a faithful representation of the two different states of the poor and rich. The way of the rich is pleasant and diverting, but full of snares and temptations; and the great number of those that perish in it is a clear proof that very few are either watchful enough to avoid the one, or have virtue enough to resist the other. *They who will become rich*, (says St. Paul,) *fall into temptations, and the snares of the devil; and into many unprofitable and hurtful lusts, which sink men into destruction and perdition.* The poor are, on the contrary, in a rough and unpleasant way, and their condition exposes them to many hardships. But their suffering is their security: it preserves them from the love of the world; it keeps them in an humble disposition; it puts them under a happy necessity of doing penance for their sins; finally, it removes from them the means and opportunities of gratifying their natural passions: all which are very great advantages, and serve as fences to keep danger at a distance, and secure their passage to a better life. So that the poor, whatever hardships they endure, have but little reason to complain of their condition; since the ground of all their discontents and murmurs seems to be no other, than that God has taken care to remove the greatest obstacles of salvation out of their way, and to have put it in a great measure out of their power to lose themselves for ever.

I know these reasons make but little impression upon men that are worldly given; because, being strongly affected with what is present, and looking upon the life to

come as a thing at a great distance, they are willing to let the other world take its chance, so they may but enjoy themselves in this; they are sufficiently persuaded, that a life of hardship is the safest way to Heaven, but being a painful one, they would rather be at their ease in the broad way, let the end of it be what it may, than to work and drudge on for salvation. But, O good God! what a strange infatuation is this! What a blindness to prefer the short pleasures of a perishable life before eternal and inestimable joys! Nay, to purchase them with endless and unspeakable torments! Most certainly either they are mad, or Christ was mistaken in telling us, *That it profits a man nothing to gain the whole world, if he loses his soul:* for truly *the whole world* imports a great deal, at least far more than any single man could ever make himself master of: nay, the largest kingdom or empire in it is but a small part, if compared with the whole.

Suppose then, that any one single man should become absolute master of all the wealthy kingdoms, states, and empires it contains, would all this profit him nothing if he should lose his soul? No, nothing at all; nay, he would lose infinitely by it. The reason is, because the world, with all its greatness, wealth, pomp, and pleasures, must have an end; but the loss of the soul is eternal and irreparable: and what can it profit a man to purchase pleasures which must certainly end, with the loss of joys that will never end?—What can it profit him to have enjoyed the world for a certain number of years, and when this term of time is expired, to pass to everlasting torments? Suppose a man had lived in an uninterrupted course of pleasures from the creation of the world to this very day, and that the fatal moment were now come to bid an everlasting farewell to all those pleasures, and begin an unhappy eternity! Alas! what would the past enjoyments of pleasures avail him? What would it profit him to have lived great, to have had the world at command, to have indulged his senses with every thing he could desire, if, after all, he must not only see the end of all his temporal felicity, but pass from it to a state of endless misery and torments? It is certain his condition would be no better, in reference to the time past, than if his whole life had passed in a dream: nay, the remembrance of past pleasures would rather aggravate than mitigate his misfortune.

Whence it appears how senseless men are, to hazard their

salvation for the enjoyment only of such pleasures as the narrow compass of a private fortune will afford them: for if the gaining even of the world, with all its riches, pomps, and pleasures, be no manner of equivalent or compensation for the loss of their souls, what madness is it then to throw away this precious treasure for so small and inconsiderable a part of it, as bears no manner of proportion to the whole?

Hence also we may gather, how much they are to be lamented who, to gratify some one single passion, forfeit all their title to eternal happiness. The case I speak of is theirs who, having otherwise a sense of God and religion, are however, through natural temper and custom, enslaved to some one particular vice, and have no other impediment to obstruct their way to salvation. Now, since even those are pronounced unhappy, who should lose their souls to gain the whole world; how deplorable then is their case, who lose their souls, not for a full enjoyment of all the pleasures the whole world can afford, but for the miserable satisfaction of gratifying every now and then that single inclination, which tyrannizes over them? And even that too with such after-gripes and remorses of a troubled conscience, as utterly destroy those very pleasures, for which they expose themselves to everlasting torments? Alas! poor wretches! they make themselves eternally miserable in the life to come, and they cease not to be unhappy in this world: they lose heaven, and get in a manner nothing for it: for whoever continues a slave to any one passion, renounces his claim to future happiness, as effectually as if he laboured under all the deadly sins; and Heaven is equally lost, whether one parts with it for a single farthing, or for a thousand millions; whether a kingdom or a cup of drink be received in exchange for it.

Whoever therefore is in this condition, let him consider the unhappy circumstances of his state, and the wrong he does himself; let him consider, whether the pleasure he takes in committing that sin to which he is inclined, be worth the losing his soul for ever? Whether the satisfaction it affords him, be a recompence for the loss of Heaven? Finally, whether it can make him any tolerable amends for the endless and irreparable evils it draws upon him: alas! how infinitely disproportioned is it either to the happiness it deprives him of, or the miseries it betrays him to.

Suppose an hour's pleasure were offered us, upon condi-

tion, that the next hour we should endure the rack, would we be willing to hearken to such a proposal? I dare confidently say, if pleasures were not to be purchased but upon these terms, we should find but few pretenders to them; and yet the pain and pleasure, in the case supposed, would have a proportion both in their quality and duration: whereas no time, though ever so long, can be compared to eternity; nor can the pleasures of the life to come: what madness is it then to make the one the price of the other?

But to return once more to the poor, who are chiefly concerned in the consequence of this reflection, their circumstances are such, that do what they can, they can never promise themselves any great share in the pleasures of this life; for they can never hope to become either rich or great, nor by consequence capable of enjoying the world in any considerable degree: and suppose they had it in their power to make themselves both rich and great, with the loss of their souls, it would be nothing less than a desperate madness to do it, as I have clearly shewn. But since God's providence has so ordered things for them, as to put them out of the reach of this temptation; since he has been pleased to confine them within such narrow circumstances, as oblige them to earn their bread with the sweat of their brows; in a word, since they have no prospect before them of any better condition than that of a painful and laborious life; what is there in this world, as it regards persons under these circumstances, should tempt them to lose their souls?

It is true, they may have the pleasure of cursing and swearing; they may perhaps afford to be drunk sometimes; they may please themselves with defaming their neighbour, or revenging themselves as well as they can of their enemies; but is it not a lamentable case, to damn their souls for some such despicable and wretched satisfaction? Is it not a deplorable thing to renounce their claim to Heaven, for the very dregs and outcasts of sinful pleasures; wherewith, when they have now gratified corrupt nature to the very utmost of their power, they are still poor, and ever like to be so? They must still drudge on, and gain their living with hard toil and labour: so that by continuing under any of those habits of cursing, swearing, detracting, drinking, or the like, what do they else but lose the fruits of their necessary suffering in this life, and render them-

selves liable to everlasting torments hereafter? They cannot but be sufferers in this world; but if they will but make a right use of their sufferings, they may be infinitely happy in the next; whereas, by their impatience, and neglecting to serve God as they ought, according to their state, they take the direct course to pass from their sufferings of the one, to the torments of the other.

But to conclude; I say once more, whatever a man's circumstances are in this world, though he be in a condition to enjoy all its pleasures, he is infinitely miserable if he loses his soul; because it is not only the loss of an infinite good, joined with unspeakable torments, but it is a loss that can never be repaired.

THIRTY-NINTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE HAPPINESS THAT ATTENDS A VIRTUOUS LIFE.

A secure mind is like a continual feast. Prov. xv. 15.

Though sin ought to be detested, chiefly because it is an offence to God, yet there are many other inferior motives to induce us to it; and all sorts of weapons may lawfully be made use of against the enemy of God, and our souls. If love alone be too weak to keep us from being overcome by it, the fear both of present and future evils, or any other rational motive, whether it regards our present ease, or future happiness, may be called in to our assistance: the terrors of God's judgments have prepared the way for the conversion of many enormous sinners; and the uneasiness of a galled and fretted conscience has forced many more to seek that solid comfort in the practice of virtue, of which they always found themselves disappointed in the pursuit of unlawful pleasures.

This then is the consideration I shall at present lay before you, to excite you to a hatred of sin, and the practice of virtue: I mean, the happiness it procures us even in this world. I shall endeavour to convince you that there is no true happiness upon earth but what is grounded upon the testimony of a good conscience, and the practice of an innocent and virtuous life; that a christian truly virtuous, cannot but be truly happy; and finally, that neither the pleasures of this world can give ease to a bad conscience, nor its sufferings trouble the repose of a good one. This I shall endeavour to make out in two discourses, by shewing, *First,*

that nothing renders man's life so comfortable in itself as the practice of solid virtue; and, *Secondly*, that it even sweetens all the necessary troubles and sufferings of human life. The first of these two truths, viz. that nothing renders man's life so comfortable in itself as the practice of virtue, shall be the whole subject of this Entertainment.

Among the many arguments the royal Prophet makes use of to encourage us to the love of virtue, there is scarcely any he insists more frequently upon, or sets off with greater eloquence, than the sweetness and many comforts himself had experienced in the practice of it. *How great, O Lord,* (says he, Psalm xxx.) *is the multitude of thy sweetness, which thou hast hid for them that love thee! The commandments of the Lord,* (says the same prophet,) *are just, rejoicing the heart. They are more to be desired than gold: sweeter also than honey or the honey-comb.* And again, in the 118th Psalm, he expresses the delight he had in the observance of them. *I have been delighted* (says he) *in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches: I have loved thy commandments above gold and precious stones.* But lest we should be unwilling to depend upon his bare testimony, in the 33d Psalm he invites all to *taste and see how sweet the Lord is.* And truly, though the authority of this holy prophet suffices to convince our speculative judgment, nothing but an experimental knowledge can give us a feeling sense of this truth. It is only *seeing* and *tasting* can give us a true idea of the heavenly comforts God bestows upon his faithful servants in life.

For such is the goodness of our most bountiful Lord, that not content to reward virtue in the life to come, he is pleased to give us, even in this vale of tears, some foretastes of the incomprehensible joys, which are the everlasting portion of the saints in Heaven. His fatherly tenderness will not suffer him to let us live in bare hopes of future joys, without providing also in some measure for our present happiness. For he knows we are travellers in this life, and in danger of fainting on the way, without the help of some refreshments to keep up our spirits. And therefore lest our natural sloth should make our journey to Heaven seem over painful to us, he has so twisted together our happiness and our duty, that it is impossible to be truly happy without our doing our duty, so it is no less impossible to do our duty without being truly happy. *Who* (says holy

Job,) *ever resisted God, and had peace?* And we may ask as confidently, Who ever obeyed God, and had not peace? That peace, I say, which (as St. Paul tells us,) *surpasses all human sense*, and makes the soul enjoy a kind of Heaven upon earth. For it is certain this hidden treasure is only to be found in the practice of a virtuous life, and is wholly inconsistent with a conscience labouring under the guilt of mortal sin.

St. Austin, who first experienced the uneasiness of a conscience burdened with sin, and afterwards the sweetness of a holy life, is the best judge in this case. This holy saint had many years truckled under the tyranny of his passions: But God Almighty being *mercifully severe* to him, as he himself expresses it, would not let him enjoy one moment's true content in that unhappy state: but was incessantly calling on him by the inward murmurs, uneasiness, and reproaches of a disturbed conscience. However, as nothing is more apt to increase the violence of a passion, or rivet it more deeply in the soul than often yielding to it, his inclination to carnal pleasures became at length so prevalent, and gained so absolute a power over him, that he even grew in love with his slavery, and was afraid to be delivered from his chains, though they galled and tortured him without intermission.

But as soon as God's grace had wrought a thorough change in his heart, and rescued him from the powerful charm that held him so long captive, oh, then he spoke another language: virtue then appeared no longer the frightful thing he had formerly imagined it to be: the state of continency, which before seemed full of insuperable difficulties, and inconsistent with all comfort of life became so sweet and charming, that it gave him a disgust of all his former pleasures, as himself acknowledges to God in these pious words, *O my God, my helper and redeemer, how delightful it became all on a sudden to be deprived of these pleasures, which before I courted with so much passion! I then renounced with joy, what formerly I feared to lose. For thou, O Lord, didst cast them out from me. Thou, who art the only true and sovereign sweetness, thou didst cast them out from me, and thou enteredst into their place: thou, I say, who art sweet above all pleasure.*

No doubt but he is so to all that love and serve him with their whole hearts. His blessed sight completes our

happiness in Heaven, and his presence to our souls by grace, begins here on earth. He is our crown at the end of our race, and our comfort and refreshment during the toils and labours of it. The tenderness Almighty God has for his children is so great, that he thinks every thing but himself is too little to make them happy in this world: and since their love of him, though not yet purified from all mixture of earthly alloy, is of the same nature with that of the saints above; his will is, that their reward shall also bear some resemblance with theirs, and be at least some small drops of that full torrent of delights, which is reserved for the life to come. So that what is said of heavenly joys, *That the eye hath not seen, nor the ear heard, what God has prepared for those that love him*, is in some measure applicable to the inward joy, content and peace of mind, which is the usual reward of virtue in this life. For what a joy and comfort must it needs be to a christian, to bear within himself the testimony of a good conscience; which, in the words of my text, is called a *continual feast!* Being always attended with a firm confidence in the favour and protection of Almighty God in this life, and the hopes of a joyful eternity hereafter. This doubtless is a happiness which truly deserves our esteem and value; a happiness which surpasses all the pleasures of this world: finally, a happiness, which nothing but a virtuous life can effectually procure us.

But if we search into the original cause of this interior comfort of a soul in grace, I can discover no other than what is expressed in this celebrated sentence of St. Austin, *Thou hast made us, O Lord, for thy own self; and our hearts are restless till they repose in thee.* For since all created things have a natural tendency to the end for which they are created, and are under a kind of constraint and violence whilst they are with-held or diverted from pursuing that end, it follows, that the soul of man, being created to enjoy Almighty God, cannot but have, as it were, a natural propensity and tendency towards him, and must needs be restless and dissatisfied till she be united to him.

It is true indeed, as long as she is confined to the body, she cannot attain to that perfect union which alone can satisfy her boundless desires, and render her completely happy. However though she cannot now attain to this

perfect union, as being the proper blessing of the life to come, and the ultimate end of her creation; yet there is one of a lower degree, whereof she is capable in the interim, and which is absolutely necessary to fit her for the other. The union I speak of is, that which is now made by *grace*, and will hereafter be perfected by *glory*. And though this union by grace be of a degree much inferior to the other, yet being proportioned to her present state, and the only one she is now capable of, it cannot but give her a true and solid content; since by virtue of it the soul is not only fitted for that perfect and everlasting fruition of Almighty God, which is her ultimate felicity, and the full accomplishment of all her desires, but she is likewise put into an actual possession of him; because to be united to God by grace, is really to possess him as much as we are capable of in this life.

And though this possession of him cannot fully satiate the boundless appetite of the soul, nor fix her in a perfect rest and acquiescence, because it leaves her still in a longing desire of, and farther tendency to a much more perfect fruition of him; it contents her at least in such a degree, as the imperfection of her state will admit. It is the nature of an antipast, which stays the stomach though it fills it not: it is as a cordial which keeps up her fainting spirits, and enables her to walk on cheerfully to the desired end of her painful pilgrimage: it delivers her not indeed from all concern, apprehensions and fears; nor is it expedient it should, because our state requires that we should *work out our salvation in fear and trembling;* but it balances them with an equal counterpoise of hope, so as to keep her from sinking under her fears: it moderates their success, and frees her in a great measure from the anxious and uneasy part of them: in a word, it renders the soul as happy as her condition, under the confinement of a sinful and corruptible body, will permit.

But, as our being created to enjoy Almighty God, is the true reason of the solid comfort the soul has in being now united to him by grace; so it is also the reason, why nothing, without him, can yield us any true content: and why our hearts are always restless, uneasy, and dissatisfied with whatever this world can afford, if Almighty God be not found in it: for how is it possible a soul created to enjoy an infinite good, should rest satisfied with mere sha-

dows of felicity! how is it possible but she must be under a continual restlessness and agitation, until he, in whom all true happiness centres, has fixed her upon a solid foundation! No, christians; since it is the goodness of God to create us for himself, he has taken care to frame our nature so, that nothing but himself shall ever make us happy: and do we not find by experience, that after the practice of any mortification for the love of God, or the faithful performance of the duties of a christian life, we rest infinitely more content and satisfied at heart, than when we have made it our whole business and study to gratify our inclinations? Nay, do we not find, that whatever pleasure this world procures us, though ever so exquisite or artfully contrived, it never yields a lasting satisfaction, but vanishes like a vapour, and leaves the soul as void and empty as it found her?

And what can be the reason hereof, but because the practice of virtue is a means to unite us to God; and the pleasures of this world remove us at a distance from him? Whence, the soul being conscious to herself that earthly delights are so far from promoting her true happiness, that they are a real obstacle to it, she cannot possibly find a solid comfort in them. It is true, the pleasures of this world may gratify the senses, but can never content the heart; they may serve for a sort of pleasing amusement, but can never afford a lasting satisfaction; nay, what is more, they generally cloy and surfeit even those that are fondest of them; and when they are gone off, seldom fail to leave a heavy heart behind.

And therefore, the Holy Ghost, by the pen of the wise man, represents the damned in hell venting their despair, and condemning their past criminal pleasures in these remarkable words: *We have been wearied in the ways of iniquity and perdition, and we have walked hard ways:* Whence it appears, that how pleasing soever the broad way that leads to hell, may appear to flesh and blood, it wants not its thorns, which often wound the heart in its most sensible part, and render it very uneasy under the gayest outside; whereas the practice of virtue, though hard and difficult in appearance, is sweet and comfortable in the bottom, and always attended with true joy, content, and satisfaction.

Virtue, indeed, like bitter draughts, is somewhat dis-

relishing to sense, but brings always with it health and soundness to the mind: it begins sometimes in *tears*, but always ends in *joy*. There is indeed some pain and trouble to be undergone in sowing the first seeds of virtue, and weeding out our sinful inclinations; but this small trouble is afterwards rewarded with a plentiful harvest of solid comfort. The purifying of the soul from all its peccant humours, as well as that of the body, cannot but be attended with some trouble and inconvenience; but the pleasure of health, that follows it, is an abundant compensation for the one as well as the other.

Oh! can there be a greater satisfaction to a christian, than, when the day is over, to sit down with the testimony of a good conscience, and this heart comforting thought: I have done nothing to-day wherewith my conscience can reproach me: I have performed all my duties; I resisted this temptation; I avoided that occasion of sin; I mastered my passion, when I was so and so provoked! Such a consciousness affords a comfort, that surpasses all the pleasures of this world; fixes the soul in a true christian peace; and prepares her for the everlasting repose of the saints in Heaven.

FORTIETH ENTERTAINMENT.

VIRTUE SWEETENS ALL THE SUFFERINGS OF HUMAN LIFE.

My yoke is sweet, and my burden light. Matt. xi. 30.

Our Saviour calls the evangelical law a *yoke* and a burden, because the observance of it is painful to corrupt nature, considered as such: for corrupt nature loves ease, liberty and pleasures; but the evangelical law recommends labour, watchfulness, and penance: corrupt nature inclines us to pride; but the evangelical law pronounces it to be a mortal poison to the soul: Finally, corrupt nature is the source of an inordinate love, by which it seeks itself in every thing; but the evangelical law commands us to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, and follow Christ. And how then can the *yoke of Christ* be called *sweet*, and *his burden light?* Since it is so contrary to all the inclinations that are born with us.

But we may as well ask, how can that meat be good and savoury in itself, which is not relished by a depraved palate,

or at which a foul stomach nauseates? For as in this case the fault is not in the meat, but in the stomach, so it is in the duties commanded by the gospel. If they be disrelishing, if they seem a grievance to nature, it is our corruption makes them so. The palate of the soul is deprived by some vicious inclinations, and therefore cannot taste the sweetness of a virtuous life; whereas pious christians, who by subduing their passions have raised themselves above flesh and blood, find a solid comfort in the practice of it, as I have clearly proved in my former discourse, wherein I shewed that nothing renders man's life so comfortable in itself as the practice of virtue; and though this alone be a convincing proof of this sacred truth, viz. *that the yoke of Christ is sweet, and his burden light.* I shall now proceed to shew further, that this yoke is not only sweet in itself, but that it even sweetens all the necessary sufferings of human life; which shall be the subject of this Entertainment.

St. Austin compares the yoke of Christ to the wings of birds, which are a weight indeed, but such as bear them up: *Take away* (says he,) *this weight, and they cannot fly; let them have it and they can fly: such is the yoke of Christ: it is carried by us, and it carries us.* So that whereas other burdens press us down, the yoke of Christ is of a quite different nature; it is a burden that raises those who carry it from the earth; it bears them up, and keeps them from sinking under any pressures and incumbrances of this life. Which similitude suits very well with these comfortable words of our Saviour: *Come all to me that are oppressed and I will refresh you; for my yoke is sweet, and my burden light.* As if one should say, fear not that I should lay heavy burdens on you; I invite you indeed to come and put on my yoke; but it is to ease and comfort, not to gall or fret you.

It is true, the privilege of virtue consists not in exempting men from suffering. Oh no, the disciples of the cross must not pretend to be exempt from crosses, since their Lord and Master has walked before them carrying his cross; nay, I scruple not to own, that (setting aside those evils which are the natural attendants of sin) the crosses of the just in this life are generally more numerous, and even heavier in themselves than those of the wicked, as being the peculiar portion of the just in this life, and the surest pledges of God's love and favour; but there is this great

difference between the crosses of the just and those of the wicked; that whereas these are destitute of all solid comfort in their crosses, the just have, on the contrary, both many helps to alleviate, and comforts to sweeten theirs.

The first of these, and basis of all the rest, is the strengthening grace of Jesus Christ; which, as it is bestowed in greater abundance on the just in this life, so it gives them this advantage over the wicked, that they are more powerfully succoured in the carrying of their crosses: for it is by means of this supernatural help that God makes good his promise of *being always with them in tribulation;* and that in such a manner as to be present to them, not only as a witness or spectator to encourage them, but as a partner with them, and assistant to them in their labours. If a violent temptation assaults them, his grace comes in to their aid, and makes the temptation itself turn to the advantage of their souls: if the world rises against them, or persecutions threatens them, God is their strength and comfort; his grace inspires them with resolution, and they can truly glory with the Psalmist, *The Lord is my helper: I will not fear what men shall do to me:* finally, whatever cross befal them, though too heavy for nature to bear, God's grace is all sufficient to keep them from sinking under it.

So that every virtuous christian may say with St. Paul, *Not I, but God's grace with me:* and it is with reference to this divine assistance we may apply the words of Isaiah, *The yoke shall be destroyed, because of the anointing;* that is, the interior unction of divine grace shall so strengthen their souls, that the pressures and afflictions which would be an intolerable burden without it, shall become light and easy with it. For it is proportionably with the soul as with the body; and as the same weight which would bear down and overcome a weakly body, will perhaps be nothing to one that has his full strength, so the same crosses, which with their weight would oppress a soul destitute of the superabundant grace St. Paul speaks of, shall be cheerfully carried by those who are strengthened with this supernatural unction.

It was this gave St. Paul the confidence to boast, *That he could do all things in him who comforted him;* which, in effect was not glorying in his own strength, but magnifying the power and efficacy of God's grace; which, work-

ing in and with his creatures, renders everything, though ever so contrary to nature or above its strength, not only possible but easy. For which reason St. Austin prayed thus to Almighty God, *Give, O Lord, what thou commandest, and command whatever thou pleasest:* as if one should say, Lend but thy helping hand, enable me with thy powerful grace, and then command me to do or suffer anything, though ever so difficult or painful in itself. Because he knew, that as nothing was either impossible or difficult to God's holy grace, so it rendered all things even easy to such as are favoured with this heavenly blessing.

But besides this peculiar advantage of virtuous christians, there is another which makes the bitter cup of afflictions go down, not only with ease, but even with delight and pleasure: I mean the *love of God,* which is predominant in the hearts of the just, and increases by the same degrees as grace makes its progress in their souls. Now experience tells us what power love has over the heart, and how it sweetens everything, though ever so repugnant to nature; so that those very things, which without love are disagreeable and painful, become pleasing and delightful with it: this appears plainly in natural love, as that between friend and friend, parents and children, husband and wife. Do we not find that fourteen years of hard service seemed but as a few days to Jacob, because he had a tender love for Rachel, who was to be the reward of his service? which made St. Austin say, that whereas every thing is painful to one that is cold or indifferent, love alone takes away all difficulties, and feels no pain or trouble. *Qui amat non laborat.*

If then mere natural love has such a powerful charm, as to render all things easy, can we attribute less to the love of God, when it has full possession of the heart; or wonder it should sweeten the most bitter cup of afflictions?—The love of God, I say, which has nothing less than infinite goodness and beauty for its object; and must therefore affect the heart more powerfully than any other love, as its object is more transcendantly excellent and charming than any created object: for if men can, for the sake of persons they love, take delight in things that are otherwise painful to nature, what wonder is it that they who love God with their whole hearts, should find their joy in suffering for his sake? Especially when they consider, that nothing happens without his appointment or permission; and that what-

ever happens to them, is designed by him to render them hereafter more happy, in the everlasting fruition of the object they love and desire.

I know it is usually objected, that our ideas of spiritual things, being weak and obscure, cannot by consequence make such lively impressions upon a sensitive nature, as those of material objects, which are conveyed to us by the ministry and evidence of our senses: but though something of this may be allowed, yet if we consider that the peculiar effect of grace, where it abounds, is to raise the soul in some measure above the impressions of flesh and blood, and that what is wanting of evidence to the revealed truths of faith, is abundantly supplied by their infallible certainty, we shall have no difficulty to conceive, that though God be invisible to our corporeal eyes, the love of him, as known by a strong and lively faith, may inflame the soul more ardently, and work more powerfully upon the heart, than the most charming objects of our senses.

Nor will it appear strange that a christian, who is thoroughly penetrated with the sacred truths delivered in the gospels, shall not only find sufficient consolation, but even joy, in suffering for love of him, whom he believes to be both infinitely amiable in himself, and infinitely good to his creatures; whom he knows to have laid down his sacred life for the love of him, and prepared eternal and imcomprehensible rewards for those that love him: when a christian, I say, is thoroughly penetrated with these truths, and his heart accordingly affected with them, the sufferings of this life are then received not only with submission, but even with joy.

We have almost as many instances of this truth, as there have been martyrs in God's church. St. Paul says of himself, not only that he rejoiced, but *that he overabounded with joy in all tribulation:* and the history of St. Andrew's martyrdom tells us, that this blessed apostle was even transported with joy, when he came in sight of the cross whereon he was to die: Finally, St. Luke relates, that St. Peter, and some others, having been publicly scourged by order of the Jewish council, *departed rejoicing from the council, because they were thought worthy to suffer contumely for the name of Jesus.* Oh! it was their love for this sweet name that sweetened all their sufferings; that turned the marks of ignominy and disgrace into

badges of the greatest honour; that, finally, bathed their souls in a torrent of delights, whilst their bodies streamed with blood, and smarted under the stripes inflicted by their cruel tormentors.

Neither has the force of this invincible charm of divine love only appeared in the apostles, but in thousands of martyrs, who, in the several persecutions raised against the Church, have not only laid down their lives for Christ's sake, but ever behaved themselves with an undaunted courage, and even cheerfulness, amidst the most cruel torments: *they were made to pass through fire*, (says St. Bernard,) *but their love could not be burnt: they were put to the sword, but their love could not be cut asunder; they were thrown headlong into the sea, but their love could not be drowned:* the love they had for Jesus Christ rendered them invincible against all the attempts of cruelty and malice.

It was this invincible power of divine love made St. Paul confidently defy anything in this world to separate him from Christ: *who* (says he) *shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress? Or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? Nay, in all these things we overcome through him who has loved us: for I am sure, that neither death, nor life, nor powers, nor things present, nor to come, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ our Lord.* See here the invincible power of divine love: how it raises the soul above all the world! How it arms her with a certain irresistible force and courage against all the sufferings of this life! And it is not to be doubted but the same cause would produce the same effect, if we made it our business to enkindle this sacred fire in our hearts; and, instead of setting our affections upon earthly things, we endeavoured, by a daily progress in virtue, to make Jesus Christ the only object of our love.

Now then, I dare appeal to any one, whether it be not our interest, as well as duty, to make the study and practice of virtue our principal business? For can there be a state of happiness under Heaven to be compared to that of a virtuous christian? Is it not much happier, even as to this world, to be God's friend, than to be his enemy? Is not the testimony of a good conscience, though we should only consult self-love, preferable to the uneasiness and reproaches of a bad one? Finally, is it not much

more comfortable to enjoy a constant peace of mind, than to repine and fret, and lie at the mercy of every crossing accident to vex and torture us? Now, it is virtue alone can procure the happiness of the one, and deliver us from the trouble and vexations of the other: it is virtue alone can render us God's friends, and the objects of his fatherly love and protection: finally, it is virtue alone can give us true peace of mind, fix in us an equality of temper, amidst the changes and vicissitudes of human life, and fill our hearts with joy, in spite of all the crossing accidents that can befal us.

And what then have we else to do, but to make it our principal study to advance daily in the practice of solid virtue? Since, though we had no other motive to determine us to it, this alone might suffice, viz. because we stand continually in need of a large stock of virtue to support us under the necessary sufferings of this life: for, as long as we dwell in this vale of tears, there is a necessity of suffering. What condition soever we make choice of, what way soever we turn ourselves, we shall always meet with crosses: and is it not then our interest to have it always in our power to manage them so, as to render them both easy and profitable to us? Now it is certain, that nothing but a great stock of virtue can procure us this blessing; for how is it possible we should have any comfort in our lives, as long as we are impatient and fretful, upon every trifling accident that thwarts our inclinations? Must not that person be a continual torment to himself, whose pride makes him unable to brook the least neglect, or even imaginary affront? Whose impatience makes every light cross an insupportable affliction to him? Finally, whose sloth turns every little duty into an intolerable task? Oh, if we had but once deeply settled in our souls the habits of patience, humility, submission to the will of God, and such like charming virtues, experience would soon convince us, that there is no such thing as true happiness without them; and that with them alone any state whatever would suffice to make us happy. What stronger inducement, therefore, can we have to spur us on to virtue? Since true and solid happiness, even in this life, is the immediate fruit of it; and what is still far more, eternal happiness depends upon it, as being the undoubted reward of virtue in the life to come.

FORTY-FIRST ENTERTAINMENT.

CHRIST'S LOVE IN SUFFERING AND DYING FOR US.

We have known the charity of God, because he hath laid down his life for us. 1 John iii. 16.

THESE words of St. John import no less, than that our Saviour's laying down his life for us is such an unparalleled instance of his love, that from it alone we can truly judge to what degree he has loved us: *We have known the charity of God, because he hath laid down his life for us.* All other favours, though great in themselves, are in a manner eclipsed by it, and seem to lose their value in the comparison: It is on this account the Church, in her preface upon Holy Saturday, sets forth the greatness of this blessing, even with a lessening reflection upon the benefit of creation: *For what* (says she) *would it have availed us to have been born, had we not also been redeemed?* And in the same preface she expresses her grateful sense of it in these terms: *Oh! wonderful condescension of thy goodness towards us! Oh! inestimable force of love! to redeem a slave, thou hast delivered up thy only son.*

This plainly shews the high idea the Church has of Christ's love, in suffering and dying for us: And since no consideration can be more powerful to inflame us with the love of God, nor by consequence furnish us with a stronger motive to hate sin, which is God's enemy; the subject of this Entertainment shall be some reflections upon this surpassing instance of our Saviour's love; whence I shall take occasion to shew what influence it ought to have upon our practice.

It is related in the 11th chapter of St. John, that Christ being about to raise Lazarus to life, was observed to weep. Some of the Jews then present, attributing his tears to a natural tenderness and grief for the party deceased, said to each other with a kind of admiration, *Ecce quomodo amabat eum!* See how he loved him! Now, if the Jews concluded from our Saviour's tears, that he had a more than ordinary kindness for Lazarus, and at the same time seemed to admire his goodness, in the tender concern he shewed on that occasion; when therefore we see him shed not a few tears, but the last drop of his most precious blood;

when we see him covered all over with wounds, as so many eyes weeping blood for man; with what astonishment ought we to cry, *Ecce quomodo amabat eum!* See how he loved him!

However, though we must own indeed, the Jews had reason enough to conclude, from our Saviour's weeping for Lazarus, that he had a great affection for him; yet humanly speaking, there appeared but little reason for their being any way surprised at it, because it was well known that Lazarus had always been much devoted, both to Christ and his apostles, and had in all likelihood contributed liberally towards their subsistence. But if in his life-time he had been a declared enemy to him, and one of those who thirsted after his blood, there had been ground enough for wonder and astonishment, if Christ had, notwithstanding given so remarkable a demonstration of kindness for him, as even to honour him with his tears; because to love an enemy was a virtue unknown among the Jews, and much more to love him so, as to be sensibly affected with his misfortunes: And how then ought we to be transported with astonishment, when we see him love sinners, who are truly his enemies, so as to lay down his sacred life, and suffer the most cruel torments to deliver them from eternal death! This indeed is such an excess of love as justly challenges our highest admiration, and obliges all mankind to proclaim the wonder of it, and cry out with all the sense of gratitude their hearts are capable of, *See how he loved him!*

Oh! see and weigh it well; consider every circumstance of it. The angels offended God but once in thought, and were immediately condemned to everlasting flames: And why then were we more favourably dealt with? There is no reason to be given for it but God's infinite mercy, which was wholly gracious and undeserved. He justly condemned the angels; and had not his mercy interposed, all mankind had fallen under the same condemnation: For as we were their fellow criminals, if pure justice had given sentence, our doom had been the same with theirs, and Heaven for ever shut against us: But Almighty God, out of an excess of goodness to which we had no title, was pleased from all eternity to cast a merciful regard upon us, and provide an expedient to *cancel the hand-writing that was against us*, and rescue us from the punishment our sins had deserved.

Yet all this while, God clearly saw how much this infi-

nite mercy would be under-valued and abused. He foresaw, that though the mercy he designed was to be general and common to all, the greatest part of mankind would, through their own malice, frustrate all the ends of it; some by disowning the favour, and others by neglecting to apply to their souls the fruit of it, and even turning it into an occasion of their great ruin. Finally, he foresaw, that notwithstanding all the means he should provide to deliver them from the slavery of sin, innumerable souls would be so little sensible of the blessing offered them, as to choose to continue under their bondage, rather than contribute any endeavours towards the happiness he should purchase for them. It was under this prospect he decreed our ransom: nor could the certain foresight of so general an ingratitude provoke him to the least abatement of his intended bounty.

And here we ought particularly to admire his infinite goodness, in providing not a barely necessary, but even a *plentiful redemption* for those, whom he knew, would make so little use of it. For though his wisdom had the choice of many both easy and effectual expedients to wrest us from the power of darkness, his love would pitch upon no other than the incarnation and death of his only Son; and a death as ignominous and cruel in all its circumstances, as could be inflicted on the most infamous malefactor. Whereas nothing is more certain, than that one single drop of blood, nay, one single tear shed by the Son of God, would, according to the strictest laws of justice, have made full atonement for all our sins; because the dignity of his person being infinite, it follows, that the least humiliation of the Son of God, offered by way of atonement, was a satisfaction of infinite value, and by consequence sufficient to clear all debts, and *cancel the whole hand-writing that was against us.*

But what was abundantly sufficient to satisfy God's justice, could not satisfy his love. Oh! it was his love for man, and nothing but his love, made him spill that sacred blood, each drop whereof was the full price of the world's redemption, as prodigally as if it had been the blood of some vile slave. It was love made him undergo both the confusion and torment of a public scourging, executed with the utmost barbarity. It was love made him exchange his heavenly diadem for a painful crown of thorns; his robes of immortality for a fool's coat; and his joys at the right hand

of his Father, for torments amidst murderers and thieves. Finally, it was the force of love made him hang for three whole hours on the cross, labouring under unspeakable tortures, and exposed to the insults and scoffs of his enemies. *See how he loved him !*

You will say, perhaps, why then would our Saviour choose to suffer such a painful death, if it was not necessary for man's redemption ? I answer, that though it was not absolutely necessary for man's redemption, it was at least necessary for our example and instruction : And therefore our Saviour chose not to come in quality of our Redeemer only, but also to be our *master* and *guide :* Our master to teach us the way to Heaven, and our guide to walk before us. His life was to be the model of ours, and his death an everlasting source of grace to our souls. His poverty was to confound our love of riches ; his humility to cure our pride ; and his painful sufferings to put out of countenance the eager pursuit of our ease and pleasures. It is certain, if what sufficed to pay our ransom could have satisfied his love, all that precious blood, so profusely spilt, might have been spared : but to shew how dear our salvation was to him, he stopped at nothing that might any ways promote it, or encourage us to put in practice the means he should mark out for our attaining to it. *See how he loved him !*

O Divine Redeemer ! How dear has it cost thee to save my sinful soul ! My sinful soul, I say, which will perhaps be yet so cruel to herself, and ungrateful to thee, as to defeat all thy designs of love ; to frustrate all thy pains and labours ; and lastly, to lose and damn herself, in spite of all thou has done and suffered to redeem and save her. Is it then possible, that after such demonstration of love, we can have the hearts to continue thy enemies ! Can we do anything but love thee ! Can our lives be directed to any other end than to promote the honour and interest of thy holy name !

But, alas ! in spite of all the most endearing engagements to love, men usually remain cold, as if Almighty God had done nothing for them : So that it is hard to determine, which is the most astonishing wonder of the two, God's love for man, or man's ingratitude to God : That God should die for us, even when we were the objects of his just hatred ; or that after he had died and suffered such torments for us, we should make so small a matter of still

deserving, by repeated provocations, to continue under his displeasure: For, suppose the very meanest wretch upon earth had but lost a leg or arm, out of pure kindness for any of us; should we not have a hearty love for him, and take all occasions to testify our gratitude to him? And is it not then monstrous, that after the Son of God has even lost his life, and sacrificed himself wholly out of pure love for us, we should remain insensible of the obligation, and even repay him with offences and ingratitude! But let us now at least begin to make him some better return; and in order to it, let us consider how this may be put in practice by persons of all states and conditions.

The second book of Kings has furnished me with a passage very applicable to our present purpose. We read there, that when Absalom's rebellion first broke out, and David was preparing to march against him, there happened to be at court one Ethai, a foreigner, and subject to the king of Geth. David being unwilling to expose this noble youth to any hazard, exhorted him to return home, and not involve himself in the dangers of a civil war. But Ethai being resolved to share with David in his adverse as well as prosperous fortune, made him this generous answer: *As the Lord liveth, and as my Lord the King liveth, in what place soever my Lord the King shall be, whether in life or death, there also will thy servant be.* This generous resolution of Ethai, proceeded doubtless from the sincere love and affection he had for David, and contains a great instruction for all Christians, teaching them how they ought to be affected in their hearts, and behave themselves in all incident occasions towards their Lord and sovereign Jesus Christ, of whom David was a figure. Let us now make the application.

It is certain, that the only acceptable return we can make to Christ for his love, in laying down his life for us, is to love him with our whole hearts. For love, if it be sincere, is not an idle or inactive virtue, which can lie hid in the soul without manifesting itself by outward works; for if it be there, it will certainly put us upon action: it will set all the powers of the soul at work, to study and follow in all things the divine will and pleasure; and as the love which Ethai had for David made him, in the very first occasion that presented itself, readily offer his service to him, even with the hazard of his life, so will the love of God, if hearty and

sincere, in all occurrences whatever move the will to espouse God's cause, though life and all must be sacrificed in the defence of it. So that a true lover of Christ will be ever ready to make good this generous protestation of Ethai, *In whatever place my Lord shall be, whether in life or death, there also will thy servant be;* that is, he will choose to suffer any extremities, and even death itself, rather than depart from his lord and master upon any worldly considerations.

However, there is a great difference between Ethai's case in relation to David, and ours in reference to God. But the difference makes only to our confusion, if we shew ourselves less resolute and zealous in God's service than he was to serve the king; because what Ethai did for David was done gratis, for he had no obligation to hazard his life in his cause; whereas if God should please to demand it of us, we are bound by all the ties both of gratitude and fidelity, to obey his orders. We are bound in gratitude, because he has already laid down his life for us; and we are likewise bound in virtue of our allegiance, because we have sworn fidelity to him at the font; and he being our sovereign Lord, it is our indispensable duty to sacrifice our lives for him, and suffer death rather than abandon or betray his cause.

It is true, we may perhaps never be in the occasion of giving him these testimonies of the love we owe him, but we are always bound to be heartily prepared for it, and it will easily appear by our behaviour on lesser occasions, whether this disposition be truly in our hearts. For though there be but few that have the opportunity to die for Christ, no man wants the opportunity of suffering something for him; because every one is almost daily in the occasions of suffering something for virtue or conscience sake; and whatever is suffered on this score, is suffered for Christ. So that struggling with difficulties in the discharge of necessary duties, mortifying our passions, avoiding the occasions of sin, daily combating against some sinful habit, and the like, is all suffering for Christ; and though it be not dying for him, it is at least dying to ourselves for his sake. To say nothing of the crosses we daily meet with; for what way soever they happen to us, to bear them with a Christian patience is likewise suffering for Christ.

Now then, if we pretend to love him so as to be ready to follow him *in life and death*, we must shew it by our beha-

viour in these sort of trials; and since we be not in the occasion of sacrificing our lives to him, let us give him at least some proof of our readiness for it by daily sacrificing to him what we can. As for instance, let us sacrifice our *ease* to him, whenever any duty calls upon us; let us sacrifice our *tongues*, either by speaking when the good of our neighbour requires it, or by our silence when it is unseasonable to speak; our *ears*, by stopping them to defamatory or immodest discourses; our *hands* and *feet*, by employing them, according to the order of his Providence, in the duties of his calling; let us sacrifice our sinful habits; our *intemperance*, by avoiding all occasions of excess in drinking; our *passionate* and *hasty temper*, by practising meekness amidst provocations to anger; our *impure inclinations*, by resisting their solicitations to sin.

Finally, let us sacrifice our *wills*, by denying them all sinful or dangerous pleasures; for in this method we give in a manner our lives to Christ, by living daily to him; and though we fall not victims to him all at once, we sacrifice ourselves by piece-meal, and every part of our lives is consecrated by the many reiterated oblations of what we daily give to him. Nor is it to be doubted, but if we be ready in all incident occasions to make these small acknowledgments of our love and gratitude, we have just reason to hope we shall not be wanting in our duty in greater trials, and that we are truly disposed to follow Christ in life and death.—But if we be generally unfaithful to him in these lesser occasions, whatever we may fancy or pretend in words, we have but little reason to think we love God with our whole hearts, or that we are ready to lay down our lives for him.

It is here then we are chiefly to examine ourselves; not whether we have just ideas of the love of God, or make frequent acts of it with our lips; but whether we have effectually an inclination in our hearts to serve, obey, and please him in all things; whether we consult his will in all our deliberate actions; and if upon inquiry we find this love so prevalent in us, as to see nothing to the contrary, but that we are regularly directed and influenced by it, in the main body of our daily actions, we have then reason to hope, the love of God has taken possession of our heart.—But if none of these favourable symptoms appear, we ought to conclude all is not sound within; and never be at rest till

by God's grace, we find so far a change as to break resolutely through all obstacles to our duty, and renounce whatever we know to be displeasing to God.

In order therefore to work ourselves, with the help of his holy grace, into this disposition, let us frequently raise our hearts to God with this holy resolution of St. Austin, *I will love thee, Lord, because thou hast loved me first.* He has certainly loved us first, because he loved us when we were his enemies, and loved us so, as to lay down his sacred life for us, poor worms of the earth; for us, most wretched and ungrateful sinners. But shall we always be thus wilfully unhappy? shall we always persist in our wonted ingratitude? shall we ever continue thus insensible, and make him no return for his infinite love? Oh! that we had begun to love him, as soon as the use of reason rendered us capable of paying him this tribute! that we had been sensible of this great duty, before corrupt nature had gained ground upon us, and subjected us to the tyranny of those sinful habits, which we have now such difficulty to overcome!

But what then, must we, like the wretched Judas, despair either of the grace or mercy of our Divine Redeemer? Oh! no, we know his grace is able to change the most corrupt heart, and his mercy to pardon the greatest sins. We must therefore rather imitate the happy Magdalen, and, like her, endeavour to deserve the pardon of our many sins, by *loving much.* The consideration of past sins must be so far from disheartening us, that it ought rather to spur us on the faster; and by continually putting us in mind how ill we have hitherto requited his infinite love, quicken our zeal and fervour, and hasten us on to satisfy, as far as we are able, for the long arrears of so many years of love already due to him. And since no love can be sincere, unless it appears in a true change of life, we must resolve henceforward to declare a vigorous war against our sinful habits, and never cease fighting against them, till we weaken them so, as to force them to yield to the power of his holy grace: And though we may sometimes be wounded in this holy war, we must not lose courage, nor lay down our arms; but have immediately recourse to the powerful remedies provided in this case: for we must have an assured confidence in his infinite goodness, that if we heartily detest our sins, and continue with unwearied patience to strive against them, he will have pity on us at length, and crown our en-

deavours with success, because we know he came to seek and heal such sinners, and suffered the death of the cross to obtain grace and victory for them.

Armed therefore with this hearty confidence, and humbly prostrate before thee, our Saviour and Redeemer, we presume to make the same request, which a poor sinner like ourselves made to thee in the midst of all thy torments, and received even more than he had the confidence to ask. Our humble request then is, that thou wilt remember us in thy mercy at the last day. We confess we have no other title to this favour than what he had, viz. thy own infinite goodness. For surely that title is as good now as it was then, because thy mercies are always the same: and though thy sacred arms are not now stretched out upon the cross as then, they are still wide open, and stretched forth to receive all penitent sinners, who have a confidence in thy mercies.

Grant then, Divine Redeemer, that at our departing hour we may hear that joyful sentence, which thou hast the goodness to pronounce in favour of that happy sinner, who died with thee on Mount Calvary. O grant us this, we humbly beseech thee, by thy bitter death and passion; by all thou hast done and suffered for us: and that our souls may be worthily disposed for this great blessing, grant that we may now begin to love thee with our whole hearts, and with all our powers; and that we may never cease to love thee to our dying day; for then we shall be sure to love and possess thee for all eternity.

FORTY-SECOND ENTERTAINMENT.

CHRIST, THE PATTERN OF SUFFERING CHRISTIANS.

I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptised; and how am I straitened until it be accomplished? Luke xii. 50.

CHRIST calls his passion a *baptism*, or washing, to represent the large effusion of blood, which the work of our redemption was to cost him; which however was so far from casting any damp or terror upon him, that he complained *his heart was straitened:* that is, violently pressed with the vehement desire he had to have it accomplished. Here we see the virtue of patience and love of suffering, carried to its highest degree of perfection, in the person of Jesus Christ, whom all Christians are bound to make their pat-

tern. The subject then of this Entertainment shall be, to shew the earnest desire our Saviour had to suffer for us, and how we ought to imitate him in it.

It is an undoubted maxim in theology, that every action of Christ was of infinite value, and consequently sufficient to atone for all the sins of the world. Hence therefore we may justly conclude, that whatever torments he was pleased to endure in the time of his passion, must be attributed to the desire he had to suffer for us, as being over and above the full price of our ransom. His whole life indeed was a continual series of sufferings, and not one of all these happened to him .but by his own free choice. His infancy was spent in banishment, and the rest of his years past either in obscurity, or the hardships of a poor trademan's life, or in the more laborious functions of his mission, and persecutions of his enemies; so that whatever part of his life we consider, the prophet's character, that he was *a man of sorrow*, was fully made out.

However, though every part of his life had its full portion of sufferings, the largest share was reserved for the last part of it; to which the other were but as light skirmishes, if compared with the bloody combat on Mount Calvary; which, as it was the end for which he came into the world, so the most considerable events of his life seemed all to have a tendency to it; as the poverty of his parents, the lowness of his condition, his retirement in Egypt, and the obscurity of his education in Nazareth; all which seemed as intended to extinguish the memory of the wonders that happened at his birth, which might otherwise have drawn the eyes of men upon him, and frustrated the main design of consummating the work of man's redemption by the ignominy of the Cross.

It is true, the lustre of his preaching and miracles, after his manifesting himself to the world, seemed sufficient to keep him out of the reach of so cruel and shameful a death; but they had their alloy appointed to obscure them. His doctrine was wonderful indeed, and his miracles surprising; but his condition was poor, his conversation plain and simple, and his person without any worldly character or ornament to distinguish it; and all these served as a counterpoise to the power of his words and works: his followers also, though numerous, being mostly of the lower sort, contributed rather to lessen him, than gain him credit or

authority: nay, his very preaching and miracles, which in all likelihood should have got him most friends, and greatest reputation, were, by the malice of the Scribes and Pharisees turned against him, and permitted by God to be the principal occasion of his death.

Now, who can after all this doubt, but that suffering and dying for us on the Cross, was what he earnestly thirsted after; since it was the end to which he directed the most considerable events and circumstances of his life; disposing things so by his infinite wisdom, that not only the most remote and unconnected accidents in appearance, should have a tendency to it, but that even those things which of themselves seemed most proper to hinder it, should most immediately contribute to it.

However, there are some particular passages in our Saviour's life set down by the Evangelists, which so clearly discovered the earnest desire he had to drink the bitter cup of his passion, that I cannot omit a short recital of them. The first that offers itself, is the pressing haste he always shewed in relation to his death: for when the time of it was now drawing near, he acquainted his apostles with his resolution of going up to Jerusalem; knowing that was the theatre on which the bloody tragedy was to be acted; and that they might be assured he went to meet his death, and that nothing should happen to him without his foresight and permission, he gave them a large account of all the most considerable circumstances of the death he was to suffer; and it is expressly observed by two of the Evangelists, that our Saviour, having ended his discourse, *began to walk before his apostles.*

Now, humanly speaking, one would have thought this circumstance too trivial to deserve the particular notice of two of the four Evangelists: for what should it import us to know whether Christ walked before or behind, or in the midst of his apostles? And yet their insisting so nicely upon a circumstance, which in itself appears to be of no consequence, shews plainly, that some important instruction is couched under it; and I find that spiritual authors, in their reflections upon this passage, generally observe, that the haste and eagerness our Saviour shewed on this occasion, was altogether an effect of the pressing desire he had to accomplish the work of man's redemption: Nay, it is observable, that the nearer he approached to the time of his

passion, the more his pressing haste and eagerness seemed to increase upon him.

For being now at his last supper, some few hours before his entering into the garden at Gethsemani, he seemed to be under a certain holy impatience to have the hour of his passion come on, as appears plainly in these his words to Judas; *What thou designest to do, do with speed.* Which were not spoken to spur him on to evil, but to express his eager desire to suffer for us. Supper being ended, he goes without delay to the garden of Gethsemani, where he knew he was to be delivered into the hands of his enemies: and when the moment was now come, as soon as he perceived the traitor making up towards him at the head of a troop of soldiers, starting up from his prayers, he hastened to his disciples to bring them the news of it, and bid them rise without delay: But what is the meaning of this great haste? He has explained it both by words and actions: *Behold* (says he,) *the hour is come, and the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of sinners: Behold the man that will betray me is approaching.*

Then making up to Judas, as St. John relates, he calls him *friend*, embraces him, and receives his kiss, as knowing that to be the signal agreed upon with those that came to seize him. Yet lest the soldiers should mistake some one of the apostles for him, he told them, no less than thrice, that himself was the person they sought for. Whereupon the soldiers falling backwards like men thunder-struck, he made use of his extraordinary power to raise them again. By the same miraculous power, restoring the ear of Malchus, cut off by Peter, he checked him severely for drawing his sword in his defence, asking him, *whether he would not have him drink the cup his Father had given him.* Delivering himself up freely to the soldiers, he gave them full power to satisfy their rage upon his sacred person. All which particulars shew plainly how our Saviour was affected in relation to his passion, and the ardent desire he had to have it accomplished.

But if any one objects, that it seems somewhat hard to conceive how great and pressing a desire, as I have shewed our Saviour had to suffer and die for us, can be consistent either with that violent conflict, or the subject of his prayer in the garden, where he expressly declares that *his soul was sorrowful, even unto death,* and with repeated instances

beseeched his Father, that if it were possible, *the bitter cup of his passion might pass from him;* I answer, that we must distinguish between the impressions and fears of infirm nature on the one hand, and the desires of the heart on the other: for we must not imagine, that our Saviour, as a man, was of a nature insensible of grief or pain, or wore not the same flesh and blood as other mortals do; since the prophet Isaiah says of him, that *he bore our infirmities;* and St. Paul to the Hebrews tells us, *that he was in all things tried as we are, yet without sin;* that is, was liable to the same impressions of nature as other men. So that nature in him had its fears, repugnance, and impressions of grief and sadness, just as it has in us: but with this difference, that as his heart and will were always perfectly subject to God, so were those sensible impressions of infirm nature also perfectly subject to the government of his reason.

This being supposed, it is easy to shew how that inward conflict of nature, which broke forth into streams of blood, was not at all repugnant to the desire he had to suffer for us: for though nature laboured under a heavy load of grief, and cried out for relief, yet the desires of his heart remained immoveably fixed in God, and perfectly conformed to the divine pleasure, which he knew was no other than that he should suffer and die for us. Nature indeed was startled at the near prospect of the frightful torments he was to undergo, and therefore acted her part in crying out, *Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.* This was the language of flesh and blood; but the language and sincere desire of his heart was, *nevertheless, Father, not mine, but thy will be done;* because what nature regarded as an evil, and by consequence as an object of fear, his reason, considering the will of God in it, regarded as a very great good: and therefore, whilst flesh and blood laboured under the most sensible apprehensions of approaching death and torments, and sought to be delivered from them, his heart and will embraced them with joy, and desired nothing more than whatever his Father had decreed, should be fully accomplished in him.

So that all these *fears, repugnances, strifes, and outcries* of the inferior part of the soul, were perfectly overruled by a strong and efficacious desire to accomplish the will of God his Father; and as on the one hand, he would both

suffer those sensible impressions of infirm nature, and make them known to us, that we might not be disheartened, or think all were lost, when we should find ourselves labouring under the like infirmities; so, on the other, he would not permit them to affect any way his heart or will, to set us a perfect pattern of patience and resignation, under the heaviest load of pressures and afflictions. In a word, it was for our comfort he submitted to them, and he overcame them for our example and instruction: because by the one he shewed what might be allowed to the infirmities of nature, and by the other he taught us how the heart and will ought to be disposed: now let us see how we must imitate this excellent pattern.

It is not to be doubted, but when a person is under any great affliction, natural infirmity must have its portion of allowance: for as long as the soul is lodged in a frail and mortal body, do what you will, nature will in some degree take its own course, and act like itself: it will grieve, repine, shed tears, complain, seek comfort, and the like. For sighs and tears, complaints and moanings, are the natural language of persons in affliction: but then care must be taken, that whilst nature is allowed to act its part, God's cause be not abandoned. Care, I say, must be taken, that amidst those sensible impressions of grief and trouble, the heart and will remain immoveably fixed in God, and perfectly resigned to the divine appointment. So that if nature cries out, *Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me*, the heart must immediately answer, *nevertheless, not mine, but thy will be done.* If nature struggles under the weight of its sufferings, and seeks for relief, the heart and will must be so disposed, as to choose effectually the continuance of them, if it be God's will, rather than with his displeasure to purchase a deliverance from them.

And since it is the duty of every Christian, it follows, that we are likewise bound to use our utmost endeavour to moderate our natural *fears, sorrows, repugnances*, and *desires*, at least so far as to take care, that they have no influence upon the heart, to the prejudice of that entire submission we owe to the will of God. Because the great danger of an over violent fear, sadness, repugnance, or desire, is that such like passions, when we give too much way to them, are apt to engage the heart in their interest; and then the will, instead of being the mistress, becomes their

slave, and betrays God's cause. Whence we may clearly gather, that the virtues of patience and resignation consist not in a sort of stupid insensibility, such as certain heathen philosophers had the vanity to attend to, but in that christian disposition of the heart, which makes us effectually approve of, and submit to all the methods of God's providence over us, though ever so contrary to the desires and inclinations of nature.

Neither does the perfection of those virtues consist in a love or desire of sufferings for their own sake, but precisely as the will of God is considered in them. For (as St. Austin says) *no man loves the thing he suffers, though he loves to suffer.* Because the things we suffer, being either real or supposed evils, can in themselves neither be the objects of love or desire; but to suffer in conformity or obedience to the will of God, is the proper object both of the one and the other. And it is not to be doubted but the apostles, upon this motive, both loved and desired to suffer, since it is written of them, that *they departed rejoicing from the council, because they were thought worthy to suffer contumely for the name of Jesus:* And St. Paul declares of himself, *that he was exceedingly joyful in all tribulation:* to say nothing of so many thousand martyrs, who, in imitation of their Saviour and Redeemer, hastened to death and torments, with the same alacrity and joy as to a triumph.

Now all joy in the possession of anything being grounded on the love and desire we have of it, it is evident, those holy martyrs had a real desire to suffer: Not a desire of natural inclination; for death and torments are always frightful to nature; but a desire of the heart and will, which, as it was the prevailing inclination of their souls, over-ruled all the contrary inclinations of nature, and made them ready to suffer a thousand deaths, rather than dishonour or betray the cause of their heavenly master. It was a desire grounded upon the firm faith they had, that their only true and solid happiness consisted in having the will of God accomplished in them; though with the loss of all they possessed in the world, even life itself: and therefore, when the event of things clearly convinced them, that Almighty God was pleased to call them to such hard trials, they heartily rejoiced in having so favourable an occasion to shew their fidelity to him.

This then is that holy disposition we ought to enter into and arm ourselves with, against all the troubles, persecutions, crosses, and afflictions incident to human life: for we must not imagine, as if none besides apostles or canonized saints were concerned in the obligation of imitating their heavenly master in this difficult point; since St. Peter has declared it to be a part of every Christian's calling: *Hereunto* (says he) *ye are called, because Christ also suffered for us, that we may follow his footsteps.* So that patience under adversity, resignation to the will of God, and a hearty readiness to suffer whatever crosses he shall please to send us, are the essential qualifications of a disciple of Christ. *Whoever* (says Christ) *will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me;* and again, *He who carries not his cross, and follows me, is not worthy of me.* These are the rules he has set to all his disciples; that is, to all that profess themselves Christians, who therefore ought to be always in a cheerful readiness to put them in practice.

And truly, since our circumstances in this life is such, that we can never be sure but we may sooner or later be put to the trial, whether or not we are truly disciples of Christ; we ought to arm ourselves before-hand with all the virtues necessary to support us in the day of battle, that when it comes we may then resolutely stand our ground, and like those valiant champions of Christ, who sacrificed all they had for the interest of his name, fight courageously under his standard, by choosing to undergo the greatest extremities, rather than abandon the cause of justice, or depart from our duty to God.

But then we must take care to prepare ourselves for those greater trials, by our fidelity to him in lesser ones: for if we permit ourselves to be overcome by dwarfs and pigmies, how shall we able to grapple with giants? If our patience yields under every trifling accident that crosses our humours, how will it hold out under a violent persecution? If our sloth and love of ease make us indulge ourselves in every thing, if we have not courage to use at least so much violence to our inclinations, as to conquer the repugnance we have to very easy duties, how shall we have strength and resolution enough to surmount difficulties, which will try the constancy and virtue even of the most zealous Christians?

It is an easy matter to flatter ourselves with seeming resolutions of doing great things, whilst the danger is at a distance; but it is most certain that they, who are now so addicted to their ease and pleasures, as to be unwilling to put themselves to any inconvenience for God's service, will be in great danger of quitting the cause of justice and religion, when their standing to it must expose them to great sufferings and troubles.

We must therefore begin now to train ourselves up to these difficult combats: *first*, by a great fervour and assiduity in prayer; *secondly*, by a constant practice of patience in the small crosses we daily meet with; and, *thirdly*, by denying ourselves many things to which we are inclined: for by this method, if it shall please Almighty God to call us to harder trials, we shall be better able to resign ourselves in all things to his holy will and pleasure.

FORTY-THIRD ENTERTAINMENT.

OF PHARISAICAL VIRTUE.

Unless your justice abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Matt. v. 20.

The word *justice* may be taken either in a strict or large sense: *justice*, strictly taken, is a particular virtue, which inclines us to give to every man that which belongs to him; and in this sense a fair dealing man, or one that never wrongs his neighbour, either in his goods or reputation, is called a just or upright man: but *justice*, taken in a larger sense, and as it is to be understood in the words of my text, is of a much more ample signification, and imports a certain complex or collection of all virtues: for according to this latter meaning of the word *justice*, he alone can be counted *just*, who is in the state of grace, that is, free from all mortal sin; for let our dealing be ever so fair and upright in relation to men, if our souls be tainted with any one mortal sin, we are void of this *justice*, and reputed *unjust* in the sight of God. So that the meaning of our Saviour's words is, that unless we be more *virtuous* and *perfect* than the Pharisees were, *we shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.*

It is therefore a point of great importance, to inform ourselves exactly in what particulars the virtues of the Phari-

sees were defective; and by consequence, in what quality or degree of virtue we are bound to surpass them, under pain of eternal damnation. We plainly see here is nothing less at stake than our eternal salvation: our Saviour's words are positive, that *unless our justice abounds more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.* Since therefore it is impossible to comply with any obligation, unless we first know what it is, it is doubtless our nearest concern to examine what those virtues are, which were wanting to the Scribes and Pharisees, and without which we shall be excluded from the kingdom of Heaven: and truly, nothing but a supine neglect of salvation can render us indifferent in a matter of this importance.

Suppose our lives and fortunes were at stake, and a skilful lawyer should inform us that there are certain formalities to be observed in the law, the omission whereof would utterly ruin our cause, should we not be very solicitous to be instructed what those formalities are, that we might be exact in the observance of them? Now this is our very case, in a matter of importance infinitely greater; for it is not a life that passes in a moment, nor a few earthly possessions liable to a thousand chances, but an everlasting life, and the infinite treasures and joys of Heaven that are at stake. Our Saviour has informed us, in the words of my text, that there are certain dispositions essentially requisite for the purchasing of the treasures, and attaining to this happy life: he tells us that the Scribes and Pharisees were void of these dispositions, and that unless we acquire them, and surpass them in virtue, we shall perish eternally. Ought we not then to inquire, with the utmost care, what these dispositions are, since without them we cannot possibly be saved? I presume then, it will be a charitable office to clear a point of this importance; and it is what I shall endeavour to do in this Entertainment, by marking out the most considerable defects of the Scribes and Pharisees, and shewing how we must avoid them.

Before I proceed to lay open the defects of the Scribes and Pharisees, it will not be amiss to give you some account of the virtues they practised: *First*, then, our Saviour never accused them of any defect in their *faith*: they believed, whatever they imagined at least, that God had revealed to their forefathers: they had a great respect and

veneration for the law of Moses, and it was their greatest glory to profess themselves his disciples. They lived in the expectation of their Messias, which was the fundamental point of their religion: nay, they were so zealous for the conversion of infidels, that they often made long and toilsome journies by land or sea to gain one proselyte.

But, *secondly*, our Saviour never accused them of any gross crimes; for he neither charged them with *idolatry*, nor violating the *Sabbath-day;* nor with *murder*, or *adultery*, or *theft*, or *bearing false witness against their neighbour:* they were also most exact observers of the ceremonial law, even to the utmost exact critical niceties; insomuch, that they were highly scandalized at the apostles, because they did not wash their hands before meals; and because, being one day pressed with extremity of hunger, they plucked some ears of corn on the Sabbath-day: besides they fasted twice a week, and their fasts were very rigorous: they spent much time in prayer: they bestowed great alms on the poor, and were punctual in paying tithes, not only of things commanded by the law, but even of the smallest herbs that grew in their gardens: and who would not now imagine, but that the lives of these men might be proposed as patterns of virtue, even to the best Christians? Were we thus punctual in the observance of all outward duties, so addicted to prayer, so just to our neighbour, and charitable to the poor, as these men were, should we not be apt to set a value on ourselves, and think ourselves secure of salvation? And yet Almighty God, the searcher of hearts, has pronounced their condemnation, and forewarned us, that *unless our justice abound more than theirs, we shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.* Now then let us examine what their defects were, that we may take care to avoid the rock on which they were shipwrecked.

Their first defect was the pride of their hearts; the two chief branches whereof were a presumptuous opinion of their own holiness and merits, and a great contempt of others: this proud opinion of themselves, and contempt of others, was chiefly occasioned by their great exactness in all outward duties: nor is this to be wondered at; because all outward actions being clear and visible, and the imagining that all virtue consisted in a punctual performance of them, they thought themselves perfect patterns of virtue, and free from all defects. Hence it was, that instead of prostrating

themselves before Almighty God in quality of criminals, and with an humble sense of their own unworthiness and misery, they planted themselves before him irreverently, with a certain air of confidence and arrogance, as if they came rather to upbraid him with the signal services they thought they did him, than to supplicate for mercy and pardon of their sins: Finally, the corruption of their hearts being wholly concealed from them by their excessive pride, they were entirely void of that humble disposition recommended by St. Paul, which obliges us, *to work our salvation in fear and trembling;* to lament daily before Almighty God the wounds of our souls, and have recourse to him with confidence, indeed, but a confidence wholly grounded on his infinite goodness, and the merits of Jesus Christ.

But this presumptuous opinion they had of their own holiness and merits, gave birth to a second criminal disposition, no less odious in the sight of God than the former, viz. their contempt of others: this appears in the proud prayer of the Pharisee, related in the 18th chapter of St. Luke; where, instead of making an humble confession of his sins, he recites a long catalogue of his own good works, and thanks God *for that he was not so bad as other men,* particularly the publican, whom he saw praying at the same time in the temple: nay, this contemptible opinion of others, and vain conceit of themselves, was carried to such a height, that they separated themselves from noted sinners, as from persons unworthy of their conversation, or even to touch any of them: for it was upon this account that they were so highly scandalized at our blessed Saviour, who refused not to eat, and drink, and converse with sinners, and permitted a notorious sinner to wash and kiss his feet.

Finally, as they had a great opinion of themselves, and contempt of others, so had they also an insatiable ambition of being honoured and esteemed by all the world; they challenged to themselves the first place in all assemblies, and required a particular respect to be paid them as they passed through the streets: they took upon them a certain air of authority, and affected to be called *master:* but, above all, they had a singular ambition to reign in the hearts and esteem of the people; for which end it was their practice to go from house to house, and insinuate themselves into the favour of certain bigoted women, as being the most proper subjects to pass their cheats upon.

Our Saviour taxes them with all these things in the 24th chapter of St. Matthew; where he discovers to us a second essential defect, which ran universally through all their actions, and tainted them in the very root, viz. a desire of vain-glory in the performance of them: for they did every thing, (as Christ testifies,) *to be seen and esteemed by men:* when they fasted, they put on an air of sadness, disfigured their faces, and affected to look pale, that the world might have an opinion of the rigour of their fasts: they chose certain thoroughfares of the town to pray in, that people passing by might take notice of them; and when they distributed alms, they caused a trumpet to sound before them that the whole town might know of it.

Thus we see the two principal defects of the Pharisees were *pride* and *vain-glory:* let us now consider how we must avoid these two dangerous rocks: their first defect, as I have observed, was occasioned by their great exactness in performing outward duties: must we then omit them, or perform them carelessly, for fear of being proud, as the Pharisees were? By no means; because a faithful performance of exterior duties, whether relating to christianity in general, or any one's particular calling, is not only commendable, but of obligation: we must therefore be faithful in performing all the duties of religion we profess; Sundays and holidays, commanded by the Church, must be religiously observed; our morning and evening devotions must never be omitted; we must fast and pray, frequent the sacraments, and be present at the sacred mysteries of the altar, and other public devotions, both with an inward attention, and such an outward decency, as may give edification to all that see us; finally, no exterior duty is to be neglected.

But we must not stop here, nor flatter ourselves that this alone suffices to salvation: for a Christian may be condemned as the Pharisees were, with all this appearance of piety and virtue; because this is partly the shell and outside of devotion: and therefore farther care must be taken, that our outward actions be so accompanied with solid humility of the heart, and sincere charity to our neighbour, that we may be as truly virtuous in the sight of God, as we appear to the eyes of men: so that it is a dangerous error to imagine the bare performance of outward duties is sufficient to salvation; because salvation is not to be attained

without true virtue, and all true virtue, though it manifests itself by outward works, must be seated in the heart.—Whoever is most *humble*, *meek*, and *patient*, most *charitable*, *mortified* and *resigned* in all things to the will of God, is doubtless the most truly virtuous; and, by consequence, whoever is neither *humble*, nor *meek*, nor *patient*, nor *charitable* to his neighbour, nor *mortified* in his inclinations, nor *resigned* to the will of God, is not at all virtuous, though he be ever so devout in appearance.—Pride, ambition, presumption of ourselves, or a contempt of others, are all great sins in the sight of God, and perhaps more hateful to him than sins that are counted infamous amongst men. Lucifer, and the other apostate angels, are a frightful instance of this truth; for they were only guilty of pride, and yet that sin alone transformed them into devils, and threw them into everlasting flames.

The consideration of this truth may serve as a most effectual preservative, both against an overweening confidence in our virtue, and contempt of others for faults, of which we are not conscious to ourselves; for how well soever our outward comportment may be regulated, it being certain on the one hand, that we are all more or less guilty of pride, and wholly uncertain, on the other, to what degree we are infected with it, it follows, that we can never form a positive judgment that we are more virtuous than our neighbour, though we see him fall into sins, of which our conscience is wholly clear; because, for aught we know, our souls may be so tainted with pride, or other spiritual sins, as to be more criminal in the unerring judgment of Almighty God, than those whom we despise for sins of a grosser nature, whereof we know ourselves not guilty.

But besides the proud opinion of themselves, which the Pharisees were guilty of, they stand charged (as I have observed) with another criminal disposition, in *doing all their works to be seen and praised by men.* Which desire of vain-glory poisoned their very best actions, destroyed their whole merit, and entitled them to no other reward than that of the hypocrites; for as they laboured to gain the esteem of men, so our Saviour told them, they should receive their desired reward in this life.

It is certain that to make any creature our last end, is attributing to it that honour which is due to God alone,

who, as he is the *first cause*, so is he the *last end* of all things. All creatures void of reason are immediately directed to this end by God himself: they all act, move, or rest, according to the system established by the eternal Wisdom, and are but so many instruments and executioners, of God's unchangeable decrees: but man having received a rational soul, and being endued with a free will, has a capacity within himself of choosing the end and motive of his actions: but this capacity is charged with an indispensable obligation of directing them to that end, for which he was created; and since this is no other than God himself, whenever he acts upon any other principal motive than that of pleasing Almighty God in this life, and enjoying him in the next, he swerves from the end of his creation, he debases himself, injures his Creator, and subverts, as far as in him lies, the order of his Providence: and this was precisely the crime of the Pharisees, in doing all their works merely to gain the applause and esteem of men.

If then you ask, how this great evil may be avoided? I answer, that the best, and indeed the only effectual means to secure ourselves against it, is to purify our hearts from all inordinate affection to creatures. The reason hereof is clear, because in everything we do, we are apt to have the greatest regard to the object we love most. So that whoever is strongly affected with anything of this world, is in great danger of performing the main body of his actions for the love of that object. This was the very case of the Pharisees: for they had a passionate love of the esteem of men, and therefore they performed all their actions to acquire that esteem. This was the idol of their hearts; this they preferred before Almighty God; to this they sacrificed those outward works of piety and virtue, which if they had been performed for the love of God, would have entitled them to an eternal reward.

Whence it follows, that every man's predominant love is a bias upon his heart, which continually moves and turns it to the proper object of that love; and therefore if our hearts were clear from all inordinate affection to creatures, we should have no earthly bias to turn away our attention from Almighty God; nay, we should then most certainly love God above all things; and whoever regards Almighty God as the object of his principal love, will easily perform all his actions for love of him; that is with a sincere inten-

tion to please him in this life, and a hearty desire to possess him in the next. For what can be more easy than a sincere desire to please a person whom we sincerely love?—What more easy than to aim effectually at the everlasting fruition of an object with the love whereof our hearts are strongly and sovereignly possessed? So that the rectifying of our intention, in the performance even of the most ordinary duties, is not so difficult a thing as some seem to make it. *Love, and do what thou wilt,* says St. Austin, meaning the love of God: because that love will of itself lead us to the intention we ought to have in everything we do; and we shall be in no danger of seeking, with the Pharisees, the esteem of men preferable to that of Almighty God, if we sincerely love him above all things.

However, we must observe, that this intention, though ever so pure, of pleasing God, in everything, cancels not the obligation we have of contenting and pleasing one another, according to the order established by Almighty God. Servants are doubtless bound to endeavour to please their masters, children their parents, and married persons owe this duty reciprocally to each other. But my meaning is, that we are bound to comply both with these and all other duties, principally upon this motive, because Almighty God requires them of us: so that a sincere desire to please God, and obey his holy will, must always be the principal end even of those actions, whereby we seek to please and content one another.

I shall therefore conclude with this excellent instruction our Saviour gave to the Pharisees, *hæc oportet facere, et illa non omittere.* It behoveth us to do the one, and not omit the other. We must not only imitate the Pharisees so far, as to be exact with them in the performance of all outward duties, that by our good example we may mutually encourage one another in piety and virtue, but we must also be careful to rectify our hearts, by a sincere intention and effectual desire to please God, and obey his holy will in the performance of them. We must follow them in a diligent practice of the duties of the religion we profess; but we must avoid their ostentation, arrogance, and pride. Finally, we must imitate their zeal for the conversion of souls, their justice in paying to every one what is due to him, and their charity to the poor; but we must beware of their uncharitableness in judging, censuring, or

despising our neighbour. And thus our virtue will now abound more than theirs, and our reward be proportioned to it hereafter.

FORTY-FOURTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE DANGER OF LUKEWARMNESS.

I would thou wert cold or hot. But because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth. Apoc. iii. 15, 16.

THESE words represent the dangerous condition of lukewarm Christians; for they import no less than the state of tepidity, (though absolutely preferable to that of professed libertines,) is attended with some dangers, in which the other is not concerned; and is in effect so displeasing to Almighty God, that he threatens the lukewarm with an eternal separation from him. This is the truth I intend to make out in this Entertainment. But lest persons of a scrupulous conscience should by mistake appropriate to themselves what belongs no way to them, because their state is diametrically opposite to that of tepidity, I shall first draw out at large the character of a tepid or lukewarm Christian, that they who are concerned may see themselves in it, and they who are not may not be frightened with dangers which are at the greatest distance from them.

St. Anselm has epitomized the whole character of a lukewarm Christian in this short sentence, *Tepidus est, qui inter virtutes et vitia fluctuat.* He is one that wavers between virtue and vice: for he is in a kind of middle state between the *zealous* or *devout Christian* on the one hand, and *loose livers*, on the other; being neither bad enough to be counted *vicious* in the eyes of the world, nor good enough to be truly *virtuous* in the sight of God. He aims to serve two masters at once, and divide himself equally between God and the world, so as to gratify nature with all the conveniencies and pleasures of this life, without forfeiting his title to the rewards of the next: for his chief business is to purchase Heaven at as easy a rate as is possible, and renounce no more of present satisfaction for it than he must needs. This makes him always inquisitive to know the exact limits of any obligation; and though there appears in this a concern not to transgress, it proceeds however

from an ill root, viz. a fear of overdoing. So that whereas persons of a tender conscience are commonly apprehensive of falling short of their duty, the tepid Christian's greatest care is never to go beyond it; and he is always more afraid to do too much than too little.

It is true he expresses an abhorrence of walking in the *broad way*, because the gospel declares it leads to hell and everlasting perdition, which he says he is resolved to avoid; but he is for enlarging the *narrow way* as much as may be, and for that purpose is always provided with a good stock of cases that favour liberty, and may serve upon occasion to bring his conscience over to his inclinations. For since he knows himself obliged under pain of eternal damnation, to keep both the commandments of God and the precepts of the church, therefore, to prevent his being too uneasy under the burden, he usually endeavours, by forced interpretations, to accommodate them so to corrupt nature, that conscience and self-love may both be satisfied at once. In a word, the highest pitch of virtue he aspires to, is to avoid great crimes and *mortal sins:* but as to *venial sins*, he is sure they will never damn him; and for his part, he is not ambitious to be a canonized saint, but will be satisfied with any place in Heaven; so that if any dispute arises between his conscience and his inclinations, he examines not whether the matter in question be lawful or unlawful, but whether it be a venial or mortal sin. If he judges it to be but venial, his inclination generally carries it against his duty.

But the main principle he pretends to govern himself by, and which gives the most plausible colour to his actions is, that *all virtue consists in a main;* that extremes of any kind are blameable, and every thing ought to be done with moderation; for he pretends to be a great lover of moderate ways, as being both less dangerous and more lasting. And without all dispute it is the golden rule of human life, if not abused by misapplication; for the very best principles, if taken by the wrong handle, may lead to the most dangerous errors. And so it happens in the case of the lukewarm Christian, who, pretending to steer his course to Heaven in a middle way between *bigotry* and *libertinism*, generally mistakes his way, and strikes upon one of the rocks he pretends to avoid: because, judging of things by inclination, which always favours the looser side, he often takes that for the middle way, which borders very close up-

on the worst of the two extremes; and so for fear of erring a little on the *right side*, he commonly goes a great deal out of the way towards the *left*.

As for instance, professed libertines stop at nothing, but let loose the reins to all irregular appetites, without any regard to duty or conscience; and this without all dispute is the extremity of wickedness. Devout and zealous Christians are, on the contrary, not only solicitous to satisfy all duties of obligation, and avoid whatever is prohibited under pain of eternal damnation, but often go some steps beyond the literal injunction of the precept, practice many works of supererogation, and mortify their humours even in things that are indifferent. Now this the tepid Christians looks upon as a high strain of bigotry, and therefore only pretends to keep in what he calls his *middle way* between these two.

I shall exemplify in the duty of *fasting*, which has two branches: *First*, to abstain from flesh, and *secondly*, to eat but one meal; both which being troublesome to nature, any slight indisposition, which he may magnify to his physician or director, as he pleases, serves for a sufficient pretence to plead for a dispensation; which being obtained, his conscience as well as body is at ease. But if there be no manner of pretence for a dispensation, and this troublesome task must needs be performed, he studies at least to make it as easy as he can, within the limits of the precept. So that what with good large allowances both in the morning and at night, and the liberty he gives himself over and above, of drinking between meals as much as upon other days, he strains the commandment as far as he thinks he may, without manifestly breaking it: and this he calls his *middle* or *moderate* way between the extravagant looseness of professed libertines, and the scrupulous niceties of devotees.

By the same rule he squares the method of his devotions. As for instance; the Church commands no other particular duty on Sundays and holidays, than that of hearing mass; persons of no other principles or conscience think it too much, even to perform this easy task: Devout and zealous Christians, on the contrary, are not satisfied with barely hearing Mass, but spend a considerable part of the day in praying, reading, and such like holy exercises. But the tepid Christian holds on his *middle way* between these

two ; and therefore hears Mass indeed, if he can do it with ease ; but having discharged this duty, and perhaps in a very negligent manner, he makes no scruple to spend the rest of the day idly, and for the most part worse than the other days, not reflecting that this cannot properly be called *sanctifying the day ;* as is manifest to common sense.

Again, the Church obliges all to confess and communicate at Easter : supposing it will be every one's concern to perform this devotion, as often as they shall be advised by their directors. Now libertines make as little scruple to neglect this duty as the former ; whereas zealous Christians take care to have recourse to the fountains of grace regularly at least once a month, and are solicitous to bring with them all the dispositions necessary to partake of the blessings they contain. But the tepid Christians thinks it too troublesome a task to be performed oftener than he must needs ; or, if he comes to the sacraments once every half year or quarter, it is generally with such a lame preparation, that it were perhaps better for him not to come at all. For though once a quarter be, absolutely speaking, too seldom, yet once a year is too often to abuse the sacraments. And truly there is ground enough to fear, that one who consults his ease, and follows the dictates of sloth in every thing that has a relation to the concerns of his soul, has as many sacrileges to answer for, as he makes confessions and communions in that lukewarm state.

But it is no wonder the Christian should thus make bold with the precepts of the Church, since he treats the gospel no better. Christ commands to *seek first the kingdom of God.* Now profligate sinners live as if they had no faith of a future state ; whereas zealous Christians shew plainly, in the whole conduct of their lives, that they have nothing so much at heart as the salvation of their souls ; for the securing whereof they study to please God in all their actions, avoid the dangerous liberties of the world, and deprive themselves, as far as their circumstances will permit, of everything they apprehend to be an obstacle to it : But the tepid Christian keeps on his *middle way* between these two ; which pretended middle way is, is in effect, the broad way of the world : for if indulging sloth and idleness ; if living without rule or method ; if being governed by caprice and humour, running into modish extravagancies, and pass-

ing day after day in a circle of dangerous or trifling amusements, cannot, without shocking common sense, be called *seeking first the kingdom of God*, then this *middle way* between vice and devotion, in which the lukewarm Christian walks, can be no other than the *broad way*, which the gospel tells us leads to everlasting perdition.

I shall now sum up the principal heads of what has been said, that we may have a full view of his character all at once. A lukewarm Christian then is one whose life is neither edifying, nor notoriously scandalous. He is full of sinful defects, and takes little care to correct them: in the discharge of duties, whether of prayer, fasting, or frequenting the sacraments, he generally has a regard to his ease; and therefore performs them so by halves that they turn to very little account. He makes nothing of venial sins, and seldom denies himself anything that appears lawful in itself: he follows the common track of the world without running into its grossest irregularities, and encroaches upon the commandments, as far as he thinks he may, without transgressing in any thing notoriously criminal. He never aspires to any degree of perfection, and therefore never comes near it; and his very best works are commonly so faulty, that their defects outweigh their merit. In a word, he uses his soul as unmercifully as a miser uses his body; endeavouring to keep it just alive, and no more.

Now, though this be the general character of a lukewarm Christian, yet every part of it is not equally applicable to all; for tepidity has many branches, and every branch its several degrees; and by consequence, of those that are concerned, some are less guilty than others. Let every one take to himself the part that belongs to him: for by that he may in some measure judge in what degree of danger his eternal concerns are: but if any one upon viewing the picture I have drawn, finds it resembles him in every feature, he may conclude his state is full of danger. The main drift of this discourse is to convince him of this truth; and though the hints I have already given, particularly relating to the abuse of sacraments, might suffice, I shall now add some farther proofs to render him sensible of it.

I have observed, in the beginning of my discourse, that these words of St. John, *I would thou wert cold or hot*, &c.

import no less than that the state of tepidity, though absolutely preferable to that of vice, is yet attended with some dangers in which the other is not concerned. It is this I shall now endeavour to make out, by shewing in the first place, that a lukewarm Christian may easily imagine himself to be in God's favour, when he really is in mortal sin; whereas the palpable disorders of a person given to vice, rescue him at least from this delusion; and in this respect the condition of the one is as much worse than that of the other, as a hidden distemper is more dangerous than one that discovers itself by manifest symptoms; because the very discovery of a distemper is at least one step towards its cure.

Now, that a lukewarm Christian is in great danger of falling under this delusion, is manifest from the very case of the bishop of Laodicea, to whom the words of my text were addressed by St. John. For this unfortunate person not only thought himself in the state of grace, but even rich in merits: and yet Almighty God, the searcher of hearts, revealed to St. John, that his soul was in a most lamentable state; and therefore ordered his apostle to write thus to him: *Thou sayest thou art rich, and encreased with goods, and thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:* which expressions carry doubtless too terrible a weight to mark out any other state than that of mortal sin.

And has not every lukewarm Christian, though like the bishop, he perhaps feels not his conscience charged with anything that is criminal; has he not, I say, reason enough to apply those words to himself, and suspect they describe exactly his case? it will appear he has, if we but but reflect that the bishop was charged with nothing but tepidity; and that this alone had consumed all his spiritual treasure, and reduced him to the miserable nakedness and poverty described by St. John. For since like causes produce naturally like effects, does it not follow, that where there is a resemblance in the one, we may justly fear there is so in the other?

This alone suffices to ground a reasonable fear that all lukewarm Christians are more or less concerned in the bishop's case; and that, like him, they are not only *poor*, and *naked*, but also *blind* enough to think themselves otherwise: I shall, however, produce some probable reasons

both for the one and the other, from the very nature of tepidity, and the principal branches of its character.

And, *First*, as to the negligent and heedless temper of a lukewarm Christian, this alone may easily betray him into many sins whereby God's grace is forfeited, and that without his being aware of it. 1. To many sins of *omission*, which are chiefly occasioned by heedlessness and want of care. 2. To numberless sins of the *tongue*, which can only be prevented by a constant restraint and watchfulness upon that restless member; and 3. To many sins of *thought*: as rash judgments, unlawful desires, &c. which those who are not over-careful to observe the motions of their hearts, will easily become guilty of.

Then if we consider the innumerable snares the devil has every where ready, to entrap the heedless and unwary Christian, how is it possible but his neglect and want of care must needs render him obnoxious to many of them, since even the most cautious and wary can scarce escape being sometimes surprised? Suppose a man should walk with a great weight upon him in a slippery place, full of holes and precipices, would he not be every moment in danger of his life, unless he picked and chose his way with all the care imaginable? Now the world is full of traps, snares, and dangerous precipices, and we carry the weight of corrupt nature every where with us; nay, and the devil is over and above ready to push us down at every step; and can a person that walks heedlessly amidst so many dangers, pretend to escape without many falls? It is true he often feels them not, and that completes his misfortune, and makes good what I have said, viz. That he may often be in mortal sin, and not know it; because the same neglect that occasions his falling into many sins, makes him often overlook them, and pass them by unobserved.

But, if we likewise consider the small account a lukewarm Christian makes of venial sins, and his aiming no higher than to avoid such as are mortal, this is so dangerous a disposition, that whoever is concerned in it will find, in the making up of his last accounts, that he has played unfairly against his own soul, and been only industrious to cheat himself: for how can it be imagined, that one who affects to be always venturing to the very brink of a precipice shall not sometimes slip into it; or that a person ever disposed to encroach upon the commandments,

as far as he thinks he may without transgressing mortally, shall not often mistake his aim, and go beyond the bounds he proposes to himself? From all which reasons it plainly follows, that a lukewarm Christian may easily imagine himself to be in God's favour, when he really is in mortal sin; which, as I told you, is the first reason why his condition may in some respects be said to be more dangerous even than that of open vice.

The *second* is, because considering the nature of his distemper, he is in greater danger of always continuing in the same state: for whereas barefaced vice is of itself a reproach to the party concerned, and his guilty conscience is every now and then apt to give him such uneasy thoughts as may in time help to work him into a desire of changing his condition; the lukewarm Christian, on the contrary, being rarely concerned in any visible disorder, imagines all is well, and thinks of nothing less than a change of life: for not perceiving anything considerably amiss in himself, he is very well satisfied with the state he is in: nay, many times takes no small vanity in comparing himself to the libertine, and wonders how men can be so wicked: thus instead of humbling himself, and daily lamenting his sins before Almighty God, he rather takes a certain secret pride in judging himself much better than his neighbour; and we may easily conclude, there is but little prospect of amendment in a person who has not yet made the first step towards it, by being sensible of the danger he is in; not reflecting that the *slothful servant* mentioned in the gospel, was condemned, though he had no other crime but *sloth* laid to his charge: and thus the lukewarm Christian usually runs on enjoying hopes of salvation with a state perhaps inconsistent with it, till death opens his eyes, and undeceives him when it is too late.

But before I make an end, I must turn my discourse for a few moments to another sort of Christian, as opposite to those I have hitherto spoken of, as fire is to water; I mean persons of a scrupulous conscience; who out of an excessive fear, are apt to take to themselves every thing that is said only to alarm loose livers into a sense of their dangerous state. By persons of a scrupulous conscience, I mean those who, though they have a sincere desire to serve God, and an earnest solicitude to save their souls, are always upon the rack, and dissatisfied with every thing

they do. If they be assaulted by any temptation, they conclude immediately they have consented to it, though they really detest it in their hearts: their prayers, confessions, and communions, though performed with a seriousness and application, with which they ought to be at ease, are all wrong in their distempered imaginations.

Now whatever persons have been seriously and frequently assured by their directors, that they are concerned in this weakness, (for it is of these alone I speak,) these, I say, ought to be no more alarmed with what they read or hear, concerning the dangerous state of lukewarm Christians, than if they should hear a warm invective against the most scandalous vices practised in the world, of which they certainly know themselves not guilty. For let them but consider every part of the lukewarm Christian's character, and they will find it to be as far from representing their case as the picture of a *camel* is from representing a *gnat*.

A supine neglect in the concerns of salvation, is the characteristic sin of the lukewarm; whereas an excessive solicitude is, on the contrary, the faults of the scrupulous.—The lukewarm lay themselves open to many great sins, by contemning those that are venial; but the scrupulous are, on the contrary, under a continual panic terror, and as the Psalmist describes them *trembling with fear, where there is no ground of fear*. The lukewarm consults their ease in all duties relating both to prayer, fasting, and the sacraments; whereas the scrupulous make them a mere rack of conscience, and insupportable burden to their souls. The lukewarm are as slothful servants doing every thing by halves; and the scrupulous are like drudging slaves, perpetually sweating and groaning under the sweet yoke of Jesus Christ. Finally, the lukewarm are but too apt to presume upon God's goodness, whereas the scrupulous seem to regard Almighty God as an unmerciful task master, or one that lies upon the catch to find fault, and resolved to pardon them nothing.

I know but one point, in which these opposite distempers seem to have a resemblance; I mean, the difficulty of their cure; though the cause of this difficulty in the one is wholly different from that in the other. The usual root of it in scrupulous persons, is a strong prepossession that their director does not understand them right, and thinks them

better than they really are; and that by consequence they cannot depend upon his advice; which certainly is the subtlest stratagem the devil can employ to perpetuate the disturbances and anxieties of these pious souls, and render useless the ordinary means appointed by Almighty God for their cure; because it deprives them of the comfort and assistance of the person by whose advice alone they can be cured. Now all I can say to this whimsical pretext (but I say it with all the assurance imaginable) is, that when a penitent has for several times laid open the state of his conscience, with all the candour and sincerity he is capable of, it is morally impossible his confessor should mistake his case, or form a wrong judgment of him. They who are free from scruples, and by consequence the best judges in the case in question, are fully convinced of this truth; and if persons, darkened with fears and apprehensions, will not submit to the judgment of those who see things in a clear light, it is a sign they resolve not to be cured. But if they are still willing to receive advice, the best thing they can do to be delivered from this racking evil, is to pay an humble obedience to their director, in every thing relating to their distemper: and in order to dispose themselves by degrees to this entire submission, they must be heartily convinced of the following truths:

1. That scrupulosity is no commendable quality, nor a help to devotion, but a general hindrance to it.

2. That there are dangerous *excesses* as well as *defects* in devotion; and that over-doing is a fault, as well as falling short in any duty whatsoever.

3. That they ought not to regard Almighty God as a censorious spy upon men's actions, but as an indulgent father, full of tenderness and compassion, particularly to those who seek sincerely to please him.

4. That the yoke of Christ is not a tyrannical law, imposed to oppress consciences, but to conduct men with comfort and safety in their way to Heaven.

5. That conscience, darkened with fears and scruples, is a treacherous guide, and never to be trusted.

6. That to follow the judgments of directors, which is acting according to God's appointment, is both safe and more easily answered to God, than to be governed by their own wills and fancies.

And lastly, that the plausible pretext of not being under-

stood, or thought better than they are by their directors, is a snare of the devil, intending thereby to perpetuate their disturbances, and render them incurable.

Now to return to the lukewarm, who stand more in need of caustics than lenitives; the best advice I can give them, is to meditate frequently upon *death*, *judgment*, the *eternity of hell-fire*, the *small number of the elect*, and other severe truths of the gospel, which may frighten them into a sense of their condition, convince them of their danger, and make them resolve upon a serious amendment of their lives.

FORTY-FIFTH ENTERTAINMENT.

OF SPIRITUAL MARTYRDOM.

He that loveth his life shall lose it. John xii. 25.

These words of Christ are applicable to all the glorious martyrs, whose feasts are yearly solemnized by the Church: for they truly loved their lives, in shedding their blood for the honour and interest of their heavenly Master; and in so doing, gave the strongest proof of the ardent desire they had to be united for ever to him, since they were willing to purchase that happiness with the bitterest torments, and the loss of their lives.

But how can ordinary Christians imitate the heroic virtue of those champions of Christ? *First*, every one is bound to be heartily disposed to lay down his life for God's sake, if he should be pleased to demand that sacrifice of him; and thus he becomes a martyr, at least in preparation of mind. But, *secondly*, besides that martyrdom, which is accomplished with effusion of blood and the loss of life, there is a spiritual one, made up partly of the mortification of our senses, and partly of interior sufferings, by which the will or inward man is afflicted and mortified instead of the body; and every Christian will meet with almost daily occasions of suffering this martyrdom, if he will but strive to live up to his character, and discharge the most essential duties of it: his own inclinations, and the general corruption of the world, will furnish him with trials enough to exercise his patience, and render his life a continual combat; as I shall endeavour to shew in this discourse, wherein I intend to give you some account of this spiritual martyrdom, and

shew how every one is bound to aspire to it; *first*, by dying to himself; and, *secondly*, by dying to the world.

The word *martyr* signifies any sort of witness, but common use has appropriated it to signify only such a sort of witness as by his sufferings gives evidence for the truth of the gospel; and therefore all those that have sealed the faith of Christ with their blood, are by the Church called *martyrs*, because, by laying down their lives, they gave public testimony, and became authentic witnesses of the truth of the faith they professed. But since the occasions of this martyrdom are now but rare, the generality of Christians are no otherwise concerned in it than in preparation of heart: I say, in *preparation of heart*, because all are bound to be so disposed as to be ready to lay down their lives, rather than renounce their faith, or abandon the cause of justice; for whoever is not ready to sacrifice all he possesses in the world, rather than offend God mortally, has the testimony of his own conscience against him, that there is something in the world he loves more than God, and that by consequence he is already guilty of a mortal transgression against the first and greatest commandment of the law, which is, *to love God above all things*.

But, as I have already told you, there is another sort of martyrdom, or suffering for Christ, the obligation whereof being grounded upon the very covenant we made with God, and swore to at our baptism, is wholly inseparable from the character of a Christian; and therefore begins to affect us as soon as we attain to the perfect use of reason, and only ends with our lives. This martyrdom consists chiefly in the mortification of the will, and its dying to all the lusts and irregular inclinations of corrupt nature, and so is properly called an *evangelical*, or *spiritual* death. It is called a *spiritual* death, because it is properly the effect of the spirit combating within us, and mortifying the desires of the flesh; it is also called an *evangelical* death, because all the moral precepts and maxims of the gospel have a reference to it, and instruct us in the method of it. And therefore whoever has the patience and courage to persevere his whole life in thus dying to himself, may be properly called a martyr of the gospel, because by so doing he gives evident testimony, that he is thoroughly and practically convinced of the truth and holiness of its doctrine.

But to give some farther account of the proper nature of

this evangelical or spiritual death, I cannot set it in a clearer light, than by shewing how in all its effects it resembles those which a corporeal death produces in the body: for, in the first place, as violent pains and certain strugglings between soul and body, are the usual forerunners and attendants of a corporeal death, so this spiritual death is not to be attained to, without a long and painful combat between the spirit and the flesh. For, as St. Paul tells us, *the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other.*

So that whoever resolves in earnest to die to himself, must begin with using violence to his natural inclinations, in order to master by degrees this opposition of the flesh to the spirit; since death without conflict is as unusual in the order of grace as in the order of nature; and whereas this strife or combat against our natural inclinations is the most painful part of the spiritual martyrdom we have to suffer, whoever pretends to enter the list must prepare himself for it with great courage and resolution. He must consider that man's life is *a warfare upon earth*, that he has listed himself under Christ's standard, and that in this spiritual war, as well as others, fighting is the only way to victory and triumph. He must not therefore be startled at the obstinate resistance he may meet with, either from old habits or a stubborn temper, but readily embrace all the means necessary to conquer himself: and he must remember that if his combat be great, his reward and crown will be proportioned to it.

The second effect wherein this spiritual death resembles the corporeal one is, that as this puts an end to all communication between soul and body, so the proper effect of a spiritual death is to break off that correspondence with the flesh, which is only entertained by those who therefore are properly called sensual or carnal men. This is the express doctrine of St. Paul, (Rom. viii.) where he discourses thus: *They that are according to the flesh mind the things that are of the flesh; but they that are according to the spirit, mind the things that are of the spirit. But you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the spirit of God dwell in you. For if you live according to the flesh, you shall die; but if by the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live.*

By which words St. Paul gives us to understand that a

Christian, who is dead to the inclinations of corrupt nature is so governed by the spirit, as to renounce all sinful correspondence with the flesh; and therefore in the 6th chapter of the same epistle, having exhorted the Romans to consider themselves *as dead in sin*, he explains himself thus, *let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, so as to obey the lusts thereof;* which is as much as to say, that he who is dead to sin yields not to the solicitations of the flesh, but considering it as an enemy to God, declares war against it, is watchful to avoid its snares, and rejects all its temptations with horror. For this is to be truly dead to sin, and to have broken off all such correspondence with flesh, as is contrary to the law of God.

For as long as the soul is united to a mortal body, and acts by the ministry of the senses, it is impossible we should be free from sensible impressions; this being a privilege reserved for the life to come, when the happy change of our state will deliver us from its corruption, and rescue us not only from sin, but all temptations to it. However, as long as the soul keeps the reins in her own hands, and is so far mistress of the will as never to entertain any sinful suggestion voluntarily, nor act upon any sinful impression, there is no illegal correspondence with the flesh; nor can the soul in this case be said to be alive to sin, though she be ever so strongly solicited by it, because the life of the soul is in the will, and as long as this yields not, but remains immoveable to sin, so long are we morally dead to it. So that as yielding to the solicitations of corrupt nature is an undoubted mark of a sensual life prevailing in us, so there cannot be a better proof of the spiritual death I speak of, than to remain unmoved under all its most violent and repeated assaults.

These are sometimes the effects of natural constitution, and are apt to raise such dark mists about the soul as hinder her from seeing herself, and distinguishing between suggestion and consent; but they are much oftener the remains of past habits of sin: and therefore the parties thus concerned must not be either surprised or disheartened at the frequency or violence of such assaults; on the contrary, they must expect them, and prepare themselves accordingly: nor need they fear any prejudice from them to their souls, if they neither occasion them by some fresh fault, nor entertain them with deliberate reflection; for though the

wilful disorders of their lives past be in some measure the source of their temptations, yet it being supposed that they are now retracted by a sincere repentance, and become the object of their hatred and detestation, all the influence they have upon them is merely natural, and cannot affect them with a moral guilt, which must always be voluntary, either in itself or its cause.

Now from this effect of spiritual death there follows another, wherein it resembles the corporeal one: for a corporeal death, by separating the soul from the body, although it leaves the material structure and organ of the senses, yet destroys the use they are designed for by nature: so a spiritual death, by the forementioned moral separation of the spirit from the flesh, although it leaves indeed the real powers of *hearing*, *seeing*, *tasting*, and so forth; yet it restrains the use and exercise of them to such a Christian moderation, as to retrench all sinful, dangerous, and even many superfluous acts; for a Christian, who lives according to the spirit, and truly desires to die this spiritual death, judges himself bound neither to gratify his eyes with all sorts of objects, nor his ears with all sorts of entertainments, nor his palate farther than the support of nature, which a due regard to decency requires: neither does he only deny himself all sinful excesses, as frequenting ill company, delighting himself with discourses offensive to God, or injurious to his neighbour; looking at immodest objects; drinking beyond the rules of temperance, and the like; but he also refrains from many diversions and pleasures that are wholly indifferent in themselves, because though they be indifferent in themselves, they are often dangerous in their consequence, by engaging the heart in an immoderate affection for them, and therefore chooses rather to deprive himself of them, than by enjoying them to expose himself to any danger of offending Almighty God.

But I have now represented only one part of the martyrdom or combat a Christian has to suffer, arising from the corruption and perverseness of his natural inclinations, which, like rebellious subjects, make a continual war upon him, and oblige him to those self-denials without which they cannot be subdued: but besides this intestine war with ourselves, we have a no less troublesome conflict to sustain from the malice and injustice of the world, which, with its railleries or persecutions, is always ready to oppose the

generous designs of those, who seriously resolve to model their lives by the rules of the gospel.

As for instance: if a person that has for a long time practised all the modish vices of the world, becomes, through God's grace, sensible of the danger of his state, and thereupon resolves to quit his former course of life, begins to keep regular hours, separates himself from the assemblies he used to frequent, addicts himself to prayer and other duties of a christian life; such a person must expect no quarter from the world; it will treat him as a deserter, and be revenged of him for having abandoned its cause: he will be the subject of men's jests, and brought upon the stage at every merry meeting of his old companions: if he has a weak side, they will be sure to find it out, and expose it in the broadest light: they will put the worst construction upon all his actions, give an aggravation to every thing that may lessen him, and a spiteful turn to everything that should recommend him. This is the treatment a Christian must prepare himself for, that has the courage to bid farewell to the modish vices of the world, and embrace a life conformable to the maxims of the gospel.

We have another instance hereof, relating to the obligations all Christians are under, of not revenging injuries or affronts: the gospel expressly forbids to take revenge, or return evil for evil; and the world preaches up a contrary doctrine: if therefore, upon a principle of conscience, and in compliance with the command of Christ, a person puts up with a considerable affront, suffers it, as he ought to do, with a Christian patience, and demands no satisfaction of the author of it, he shall be posted up for a coward, and become the scorn of all that stile themselves men of honour. A terrible temptation to flesh and blood! And yet it is beyond all question, that a Christian is bound to suffer this, or any other unjust reproach, rather than offend Almighty God: for our Saviour has expressly forewarned us, that *whoever shall be ashamed of him and his words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he shall come in his glory;* that is, whoever shall, through shame or fear of men's hatred or contempt, conform himself to the sinful ways of the world, shall at the last day, be disowned by Christ.

However, the trial is yet harder, when the world threatens a Christian not only with derision and scorn, but also with

loss of liberty and forfeiture of goods, in case he refuses to comply with certain proposals, as the espousing an unjust cause, taking unlawful oaths, and the like; which he cannot yield to, without wounding his conscience mortally; for here a frightful scene of misery and want, the ruin of children and family, the numberless temptations of necessity, and a long train of sufferings, will present themselves before his eyes, and press hard upon him for a compliance, as the only means to prevent these evils: and what then must a Christian do in this hard case? Our Saviour has fully answered the question in these few words, *if a man cometh to me, and hateth not his father and mother, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.* It is plain then what part a Christian has to act; for he is certainly bound to give a deaf ear to all the solicitations of interest and ease, alluring him on the one hand, and the terrors of contempt and poverty threatening him on the other: he must imitate the heroic virtue of Susanna, who, being tempted to adultery, chose death itself, rather than stain her soul with that sin: *it is better* (said she) *to fall into the hands of men, than sin in the presence of Almighty God.*

And though this seems a hard lesson to nature, it is no more than what men practise daily upon motives even merely human, or even sinful: for how many expose themselves every where in the service either of their own or some foreign prince, to all the hardships and hazards of a bloody war, in which imprisonment, the loss of a limb, or death itself, may be their lot? And can it then be hard for a Christian to suffer as much for God's sake, and with the certainty of an eternal reward as men undergo upon every trivial encouragement from one another? Again, how many sacrifice their honour and estates, destroy their health, shorten their lives, and ruin both themselves and their families, merely to gratify an extravagant humour, or some criminal passion? And ought not then a Christian to be at least as bold and venturesome to please God, as sinners are to please themselves? Ought he not to give as signal testimonies of his zeal in a good cause, as sinners do of theirs in a wicked one? The case admits of no dispute, and it is a clear proof of what I have said, viz. that a Christian's life is a life of combat and trial; and that every one who makes the gospel his rule, will have sufferings enough

to entitle him to the honour of being a martyr of it, though he neither sheds his blood, nor dies under the hands of the executioner: his martyrdom is a death indeed; but a death which only destroys the *body of sin:* it is a martyrdom, which (as St. Paul describes it,) *crucifies the world to us, and us to the world:* finally, it is a martyrdom, whereof we ourselves are the chief instruments and executioners, and which must last as long as we live.

I shall conclude my discourse with a necessary reflection, in reference to the parallel I have made, viz. that whereas a corporeal death is incapable of degrees, because one dead body cannot be said to be more dead than another; a spiritual death on the contrary, admits of many degrees, because it is perfected in us by the same degrees that the life of charity is improved in our souls: it being certain, that the more we love God, the more we die to ourselves. We must therefore make a large difference between what is of indispensable obligation, and what only regards perfection: as to what falls under indispensable obligation, every Christian is bound to be so far dead to himself and the world, as to be heartily disposed to sacrifice all rather than offend God mortally; for whoever has not this disposition in his heart, (and God sees whether he has it or not) has not yet attained that degree of charity, which consists in an effectual preference of God before all things, and without which no man can be saved.

But as to what regards the utmost perfection of this spiritual death, we are not bound to attain effectually to it; for then there would be no diversity of mansions in Heaven: we ought however to desire and endeavour it according to the measure of our strength, and to be still making some nearer approaches towards it, for if we be but still moving forwards, we cannot fail of attaining at length, to the happiness Almighty God has prepared for those that love him sincerely, and serve him to the utmost of their power.

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FORTY-SIXTH ENTERTAINMENT.

OF TEMPTING GOD.

It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Matt. iv. 7.

THIS was our Saviour's answer to the second temptation of the devil, who being baffled in his first attempt upon Christ, was permitted to take him up to the battlements of the temple, and there suggested to him to throw himself headlong down; pretending, that by so doing, he would shew his confidence in God, who had promised that *his angels would take care of him, and bear him up in their hands, lest at any time he should dash his foot against a stone:* But our Saviour soon silenced the tempter with the above-said answer, *it is written, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God;* instructing us thereby, that though God has also charged his angels to take care of us, this gives us no privilege to neglect the ordinary means of safety; and to do so, is *tempting God.*

Now this contains a lesson both of great importance and extent; since not only every Christian in the world is concerned in it, but almost every action of human life may, in some measure, take directions from it; for it teaches us, that in all concerns, whether of soul or body, we are bound to have recourse to the ordinary method appointed by God's Providence for the preservation or improvement; and that whoever does otherwise, under pretence of depending upon extraordinary ways, incurs the guilt of that sin, which in scripture language is called *tempting God:* a sin, which perhaps of all sins in the world, is most practised, and least understood: the subject then of this discourse shall be to mark out some of the most general faults whereby men become guilty of it.

There are numberless ways of *tempting God,* by a culpable neglect either of soul or body; for since his Providence has charged us with the care of both, we cannot satisfy this obligation, unless we shew a reasonable solicitude in providing for the good and welfare both of the one and the other: however, since the care of the body is a duty, which men are generally more apt to overstrain than neglect, I shall confine my discourse to such sinful neglects only as regard the soul.

First, then, all those stand charged with the guilt of *tempting God*, who are remarkably negligent in the duty of prayer: the reason is, because prayer is a general remedy against sin, and a general means to obtain whatever helps we stand in need of: it is the channel through which all blessings from above are conveyed: it is the key that gives us access to the treasures of Heaven: It is our sword and buckler in the day of battle, and our security in the time of peace: Finally, it is our strongest defence against sin, the best support of virtue, and the daily food and refreshment of our souls; which therefore can no more maintain their spiritual life without it, than the body can subsist without a competency of nourishment and rest.

And are not they then who neglect this holy exercise, justly charged with the guilt of *tempting God?* For is it not evident, that they are either bent upon their own eternal ruin, or have presumption enough to expect that God will assist them with his holy grace, notwithstanding their wilful neglect of what Christ himself has expressly appointed as a means to obtain it: *Ask*, (says Christ) *and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you.* But these slothful Christians will needs receive without asking, and have Heaven opened to them without being at the trouble of knocking: but they speed, for the most part accordingly: for as they ask not, so they receive not! And thus their weakness encreasing daily more and more upon them, and God forsaking them in the day of battle, they fall of course a sacrifice to the malice of their enemies.

Secondly, all those are guilty of *tempting God*, who enter upon any state of life without first endeavouring to secure to themselves the favour and assistance of Heaven, by using all Christian means to dispose themselves for it: the reason is, because there is no state of life, whether public or private, secular or ecclesiastic, solitary or in society, but has so many difficulties to struggle with, and duties to practise, that whatever choice men make unless God gives a blessing to it, nothing can be expected but a long train of miscarriages in this life, and endless miseries hereafter.

And how is this blessing to be procured, but by the use of such means as God has appointed? For if they consult his holy will with an unfeigned sincerity of heart; if

they implore his aid with humble and hearty prayers; if they do nothing without the advice of persons fit to be consulted, in a business of that moment; finally, if they lay aside all motives suggested by corrupt nature, and aim chiefly at God's honour, and the saving of their souls; such preparatory dispositions as these cannot fail of engaging Heaven, both to direct them in the choice of their state, and assist them in discharging all the duties of it.

But, alas! How few take this method, or even do anything that comes near it? Let but the customary way of persons entering into the bonds of wedlock be an instance of it: for how is it young persons usually proceed in this important undertaking? Do they make it their chief concern to discover and obey the will of God? Is the prospect of most likely securing in that way their eternal interest, the principal motives that determine them to it? Is every thing done regularly, and with a due regard both to decency and the established laws of the Church? Finally, is care taken that the blessing of their Heavenly Father, and a large portion of his holy grace, without which they cannot be truly happy, be not wanting?

Nothing less than all this; for, *first*, as to the motive that determines them in their choice, thoughts being either wholly confined to worldly considerations, or aiming no farther than to gratify a present inclination. Hence the concerns of the other world are usually left to take their chance: and the will of God, which should have been consulted in the first place, is either passed by wholly unregarded, or only made use of as a cover to interest, or other motives: for though his holy will be many times pretended, it is, in effect, the will of flesh and blood has the whole management of the undertaking; as is very evident, particularly in their case, who, purposely declining the advice of parents or friends, carrying things on with an affected secrecy, engage themselves hand over head by private contracts, and the better to prosecute their underhand designs, scruple not to tell a thousand studied lies, backed many times with oaths and execration to deceive those that might advise them, or inform them of the will of God, if they had a mind to know it. But this is not their business; if the present passion be but satisfied, it is all they aim at: and what can it avail them after this to make some application to God, when the whole business is in effect concluded

without him, and carried on so far, that there is no going back without violence to justice and the laws of God? For can they think he will give a blessing to a work thus rashly undertaken, or by an after approbation become an abettor of their irregularities?

And therefore they reap, for the most part, as they have sowed; and their usual portion is a long train of insuperable difficulties and sorrows, endless disputes and brawls, and what is worst of all, a fruitless repentance: which usually ending in mutual aversions, not only makes their lives a hell upon earth, but endangers their being unhappy in the life to come: for truly it is no wonder they should prosper no better, when having, by their rash and indiscreet engagement, justly forfeited the blessing of their Heavenly Father, and the proper grace of the sacrament of marriage, they neither have virtue to discharge their duties, nor strength to bear the difficulties of their state; and so they sink of course under the weight of their burden.

And are not those then manifestly guilty of *tempting God*, who, instead of doing their best to put themselves under his protection, are violently hurried on by interest or passion to bind themselves into an engagement of the greates tconcern? There can be no doubt of it; since in so doing they must have the presumption to expect that God will favour them with his holy grace, whether they use any endeavours to obtain it or not, which is wilfully neglecting the ordinary means appointed, and withdrawing themselves from the order established by him.

Thirdly, all those *tempt God* in a very notorious manner, who continue in their sins, in hopes of repenting in their last sickness: the reason is, because a sinful life being the direct road to everlasting perdition, to hope that such a life will terminate in a happy death, is to expect to go to Heaven by walking on boldly in the way that leads directly to Hell: and what is this but a most extravagant presumption? Since all the grounds those men can have to hope for salvation is a vain confidence the devil inspires them with, that though they run on in a course of wilful sins as long as life and death will permit, God will notwithstanding have compassion on them in their last distress, and by the power of an extraordinary grace rescue them from the jaws of Hell, just in the nick of time.

It is true, I cannot deny but such a thing may possibly

happen, as it did in the case of the penitent thief: but since this must be the effect of an extraordinary grace, as I have fully proved in a former discourse, it follows without dispute, that to depend positively upon it, and even to lay a design of living on in sin, is the same extravagant presumption as to expect that God will shew the greatest favour to those that deserve it least, and be the most indulgent to the most impudent sinners.

Some will perhaps ask, why sinners may not as easily repent in their last sickness as at any other time? Nay, why a death-bed conversion may not be depended on even with a greater security than any other, since men, in all likelihood, are never more in earnest than when they have death immediately before their eyes? I answer, *first*, that this way of arguing might have some force, if either any sinner could repent without the help of God's grace, or the most impudent of sinners, such as have put off their conversion to the very last, could be saved without the assistance of an extraordinary grace.

I answer, *secondly*, that if a mere *servile fear* of hell-fire sufficed to reconcile a sinner to God, a death-bed repentance might afford security enough to one that has the use of reason to the last: for I can easily conceive that a person who has lived wickedly should be seized with the greatest terror at the approach of death, and protest sincerely that he repents of his sins past, for fear of the punishment they justly deserve; as a man led to execution is sorry for having been a murderer, or a thief. But since a true conversion implies a detestation of sin precisely for it own sake, and as it is an offence to God, which is a very different motive from the former, I cannot easily conceive that a person, who has despised God and loved sin for many years together, should all on a sudden love the one and hate the other sincerely, at a time when he is in no condition to employ the ordinary means appointed by God to work this happy change in his soul.

Now this marks out the difference between a sinner in perfect health, and one reduced to the last extremity: for whilst he is in perfect health, whatever his condition may be, he has opportunity and leisure to work himself out of it by insensible degrees: he has time to pray, and read, and meditate, and perform all those exercises, which are the natural and usual means God's grace makes use of to

change a sinner's heart, and soften it into compunction: and in all this there appears nothing extraordinary, but every thing is done according to the regular method, appointed by the divine mercy for the recovery of a sinner, though ever so deeply engaged in the habits of sin.

But when such a one is reduced to his last sickness, the case is quite altered: because, having sinned as long as he could, and thereby both strengthened his enemy and weakened himself to the utmost degree, and to complete his misfortune, having now neither leisure nor opportunity, nor the ease of mind or body requisite to perform those exercises that should gradually work him into a better disposition, he is, by consequence, under all the disadvantages imaginable, of contributing anything towards his obtaining from Almighty God the powerful assistance he stands so highly in need of, and which alone can rescue him from everlasting ruin: and therefore when I consider all the particulars of his unhappy state, viz. his soul disordered with sinful passions, his heart accustomed to resist the inspirations of grace, his mind disturbed with excessive fears, such as the near approach of judgment and eternity must needs cause in one who has always lived an enemy to God; and, finally, his body racked with a variety of pains, and labouring under a mortal anguish: when, I say, I consider all these things, I cannot but look upon him as one on the brink of eternal ruin, unless an extraordinary grace comes in to his assistance; and I leave any one to judge, whether living on in sin, in hopes of being favoured with this extraordinary mercy, be not an extravagant presumption, and the very height of *tempting God?* Truly I cannot judge otherwise of it; nor can I but fear that those, who thus pretend to play tricks with God, and get Heaven by a cheat, notwithstanding the fair shew of repentance many of them make in their last sickness (which ignorant people call *dying well,*) I cannot but fear, I say, that they generally die as they lived, and receive the just reward of their presumption, in finding themselves disappointed of the mercy they have so long abused.

Fourthly, and *lastly*, all those are guilty of *tempting God*, who either continue wilfully in the immediate occasion of sin, or at any time expose themselves to it without any necessity: the reason hereof is plain and obvious, because God has positively commanded us to *fly from sin as from*

the face of a serpent; and to oblige us more strictly to it, has expressly forewarned us, that *whoever loves danger shall perish in it.* Now he that puts himself wilfully into the occasion of sin, shews plainly that he loves danger, and is fond of being tempted; because occasion alone is so dangerous a temptation, even to persons virtuously inclined, that saints themselves have sometimes experienced the fatal power of it; and it is no *hyperbole* to say, that occasion alone has murdered more souls than all the plagues, wars, and famines have destroyed bodies; and therefore whoever exposes himself wilfully to danger, will soon experience the fatal consequence of his presumption, in finding himself plunged into all the disorders of an unruly passion, for God has never promised his assistance to those that neglect the ordinary means appointed by him for their security: and since he has positively commanded us to fly from sin, and shun the occasions of it, what can such presumptuous souls as despise his holy ordinance, and will needs be trying tricks, and venturing farther than they ought; what can they, I say, expect but to meet their ruin in the temptation they have sought? Nor can they then, with justice complain of their being tempted above their strength, since, in such cases they are their own tempters, and the wilful authors of the mischief that befals them.

Thus we see how many ways we may *tempt God:* and it appears plainly, from what has been said, that pride is the ordinary root of this sin; that is, either too great a conceit of our own strength, or a presumptuous confidence in the goodness and mercies of God. Hence persons that are truly humble, have a great horror of *tempting God* in any kind: for the humble Christian being always distrustful of himself, and knowing that all his strength must come from above, is afraid to neglect any of the means ordained by Almighty God for the better securing of his soul's salvation: this keeps him faithful to all his duties, and particularly to the duty of prayer, because he knows all heavenly grace flows through that channel: this also makes him fearful to undertake any business of moment, or engage himself in any course of life, without first having recourse to the Father of lights, and employing all endeavours possible to procure his blessing.

This again makes him tremble at the very thought of forfeiting God's grace; and if, through human weakness,

he finds himself fallen under his displeasure, he loses no time, but turns immediately all his thoughts towards the usual remedies prescribed in that case: so far is he from resolving to put things upon the last hazard, or pretending to make a sinful life the way to a happy death. This, finally, makes him set a continual guard upon his senses, avoid the dangerous liberties of the world, keep at the greatest distance possible from all occasions of sin, and decline whatever may inflame his passions, or give his enemy an advantage over him.

Grant us, O God, this humble disposition; that being truly sensible of our dependance on thee, we may be ever faithful in performing whatever thou requirest of us. We know thou never forsakest any but such as first abandon thee: and it is but just that they, who despise the order of thy infinite wisdom, should forfeit their share in the protection of thy almighty power. However, forgive us our past failings, and withdraw not thy mercies from us, as our sins have justly deserved; but compassionating our weakness, enable us with thy holy grace to be more faithful to thee hereafter.

FORTY-SEVENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

OF THE BLIND BEGGAR.

A certain blind man sat down by the way-side begging.
Luke xviii. 35.

The Evangelist gives us a relation of the miraculous cure of a blind beggar, who sitting by the way-side, and hearing a great throng of people passing by, asked what it meant, and being told that *Jesus of Nazareth was passing by*, cried out to him, *Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!* But being rebuked by those that went before, who bid him hold his peace, he was so far from being discouraged, that *he cried out much louder than before, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.* Whereupon our Saviour stopped, and ordering him to be brought to him, asked him what he desired of him: he answered, *Lord, that I may see:* which our Saviour, according to his usual goodness, immediately granted, telling him, that the recovery of his sight was the reward of his *faith.* Whereupon he immediately saw, and *followed Jesus, praising and glorifying*

God. This is the historical account of this miraculous cure: now as the corporeal blindness of this beggar is a figure of the spiritual blindness of a sinful soul deprived of the sight of grace, so the method he took to recover his sight, and his behaviour after he had received that blessing, contain many instructive lessons for those who are yet labouring under the blindness of some violent inclination, or habit of sin: the deep sense he had of his unhappy condition; the pressing desire he shewed to be delivered from it; his watchfulness in laying hold of the favourable opportunity that offered itself; the earnestness and perseverance of his prayer, notwithstanding the rebukes he met with; and, finally, his hearty confidence in Jesus Christ, are the lessons a sinner must practice, after him, in order to obtain his cure. And when his heavenly physician has bestowed this blessing on him, then he must also imitate the grateful behaviour of this beggar, in following Jesus Christ, and *glorifying* God for so signal a mercy. But I shall now confine myself to the first part of the pattern we have before us; and only mark out from it, what a sinner must do in order to obtain the perfect cure of his soul; which shall be the whole subject of this Entertainment.

The first thing to be remarked in the blind beggar, mentioned in the gospel, is the deep sense he had of his unhappy condition in the want of sight; which went so far as to make him forget, or wholly overlook his other necessities, though otherwise very pressing upon him. For notwithstanding his extreme poverty, which even obliged him to beg his bread by the way-side, when he was informed that *Jesus of Nazareth* was passing by, attended by a great throng of people, instead of managing so favourable an occasion for the getting some alms, he utterly forgot his nakedness and hunger, and made his whole application to Christ for the recovery of his sight: Whence it plainly appears, that he regarded his blindness as the greatest evil and pressure of his life, and the greatest interest to be delivered from it; because whatever is preferred in practice, is a man's greatest interest, and lies nearest to his heart.

Here then is marked out the first disposition necessary to prepare a sinner for his cure: and indeed the ground-work of all the rest: for whoever is under the tyranny of any sinful passion, is utterly incapable of being delivered from it, till he be so far sensible of his condition, as both to

know and own himself to be unhappy. The reason is clear, because all the distempers of the soul being voluntary, nothing but a sincere will, and hearty desire to be delivered from them, can dispose a sinner for his cure. And since no man can have a hearty desire to be delivered from an evil till he regards it as an evil, and is sensible of his being unhappy under it; it follows, that unless Almighty God be pleased to open a sinner's eyes, at least so far as to let him see the danger and unhappiness of his state, there is no hope of his cure; all remedies are ineffectual; the very best advice and most pressing remonstrances are wholly lost upon him. But when he once begins to be uneasy, and groan under the weight of his sinful inclinations, Oh! then there is hope of him; because this feeling sense of his condition is itself a good step towards his cure.

He must therefore look upon the sinful state of his soul as the greatest evil that could have happened to him: nay, he must regard it as a sovereign evil, and his deliverance from it as the sovereign and most desirable good of his life: for then all worldly concerns will give way to the interest of his soul's salvation. His chief business will be to study and employ the proper means to compass this great end; and though perhaps many other concerns will call upon him, yet nothing will be able to take him off from those of his soul; because he will be convinced, that it is the most important thing he has to do in this world, which therefore ought to have the first place in his heart, and be followed with the greatest application.

As therefore the sense of his unhappy state is the first disposition towards his deliverance from it, so its first fruit will be, to inspire him with a hearty and eager desire of it: for no man can naturally be sensible of a great evil, but he must be desirous to remove it from him; and when this desire is once fixed in the heart, all endeavours towards it will follow of course. This appears plainly in the conduct of the children of this world; who, as they are usually eager in their desires, so are they proportionably eager in their pursuits. A person, for example, that has a considerable fortune in view, takes all the pains and precautions possible to gain his point: He makes his court to those who he thinks may promote his interest, though otherwise inferior to him: he watches all opportunities that may favour his design, and is careful to prevent or remove all ob-

stacles that may obstruct it. In a word, we may observe in him an unwearied application, and everything he says or does tending directly to the end he has in view: And how comes this? Because his heart is set upon it, and the eagerness of his pursuit is but the natural fruit of the eagerness of his desires.

In like manner, therefore, when a sinner once takes his salvation to heart; when he has an earnest desire of it, as the blind beggar had of receiving sight, there is nothing he will not do to succeed in a concern of that importance: This desire will set all the powers of his soul at work, in order to know and obey the will of God in everything that is necessary for his deliverance from the unhappy state into which he has fallen: but above all, he will be watchful not to let slip the favourable opportunity of *Jesus passing by;* but lay fast hold of it, and improve it, to his best advantage, as the blind man did; which contains a moral of great instruction: for if this poor man had not been upon the watch, but let Jesus pass by without applying himself to him, perhaps the same occasion had never offered itself again; and so he would have continued blind as he was, to his very death.

This certainly happens in a spiritual manner to many sinners, who, neglecting the precious moments that are sometimes offered them by the Father of mercies, have ever after continued in their sinful state: for which reason the prophet Isaiah exhorts us, *to seek the Lord when he may be found, and to call upon him when he is near:* And our Saviour himself, weeping over the city of Jerusalem, attributes its reprobation to its neglect of the mercy he offered it in that very hour: *For if thou hadst but known* (says Christ) *even in this thy day, the things which are conducing to thy peace; but they are now hidden from thy eyes.* And then he pronounced those words, which contains the prophecy of its utter destruction.

A sinner therefore must be watchful to observe the happy moments when *Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.* And what are those, but when he finds himself feelingly touched with some holy inspiration, which is but a *passing grace:* for it comes and goes, like a sudden ray of light darted upon the soul: And therefore, if he has not his heart ready to receive it, and make his best advantage of it; if he lets *Jesus pass by,* without managing so favourable an occasion,

for the benefit of his soul's salvation, who knows when he will return again that way? The most proper time then to make his application to his Saviour and Redeemer, is when he finds him approaching near him, and, as it were, calling upon him by the interior motions of his holy grace: It is then he must pour forth his soul before him, with the most ardent sighs of a heart pierced with grief for his past offences: It is then he must send up to Heaven such fervent prayers, as are a kind of violence to the bowels of infinite mercy: It is then, in fine, he must cry out with all force, *Jesus, Son of David have mercy on me.*

This was the blind man's prayer, when he was informed that *Jesus of Nazareth* was passing by. But what happened to him upon it? *They who went before rebuked him, to make him hold his peace.* But he, instead of being discouraged at it, cried out much louder than before, *Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.* And so must a sinner do, who seriously resolves to save his soul. If the world, like those who rebuked the poor blind man for crying so loud, and would needs have imposed silence on him; if the world, I say, offended with his zeal and fervour, clamours against him, and with its censures, railleries, and persecutions, endeavours to dishearten him from prosecuting his pious design, he must not be at all surprised to meet with trials of this nature; since the Holy Ghost has forewarned us, by the pen of St. Paul, that *whoever will live godly in Christ, shall suffer persecution:* For the world will ever hate those that abandon it to come over to Christ: it will load them with the heaviest censures, and give a malicious turn to everything they do. Their devotion shall pass for hypocrisy; their sobriety for affectation, their retirement from company for the effects of moroseness, or a vanity to appear singular. In a word, nothing will escape its malice; and the most Christian practices will only afford matter for merriment and laughter. So that whoever will effectually compass his desired cure, must raise his heart above whatever the world will say of him: For if he be concerned at it, the uneasiness it will give him will so embitter the most necessary remedies, as will render them utterly impracticable to him.

But let us now suppose the world should prove better natured than usual, and give him no molestation; yet he must expect a terrible and lasting war with himself. His

old bosom friends, I mean his old habits and passions, will rise furiously against him, and with repeated assaults and violent solicitations, endeavour to oblige him to yield up his cause, and desist from any longer importuning Heaven for his cure. But what must he do in this so difficult a conflict? When his enemies press hard upon him on the one hand, and Almighty God, his only refuge, seems to take no notice of him on the other, must he lay down his arms of prayer and mortification? Must he forbear crying out to Jesus for mercy? Oh! no, by no means; he must do as the beggar did, who being *rebuked* by the multitude for crying so loud, and bid to hold his peace, raised his voice much higher, and cried out louder than before, *Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me:* So must a sinner do, who resolves to make himself heard: He must redouble his cries and prayers, as his enemies redouble their assaults upon him: He must raise his voice much higher, and cry out louder than before for mercy. If his passions continue obstinate in soliciting him to sin, he must be as obstinate in soliciting Jesus to have mercy on him; if they be unwearied in seeking his ruin, he must be as unwearied in imploring the divine assistance to destroy them.

The devil will indeed do all he can to silence him, and make him believe his case is desperate, and that it is in vain to cry out any longer for mercy: but let him take it for a certain truth, that the life, health, and salvation of his soul depends upon his unwearied perseverance in prayer; I mean not a drowsy, negligent and slothful prayer, in which the heart has little or no share, but such a prayer as the blind beggar has set us a copy of; a prayer proceeding from the pressing desire of the heart, and in which the soul speaks much louder than the tongue: for whoever is perseverant in daily sending up such prayers to Heaven ought to have a hearty confidence to see them in due time blessed with success: and if Almighty God seems for some time to have no regard to them, as Christ seemed at first to take no notice of the beggar, it is only to oblige him, by this seeming refusal, to redouble his fervour, and cry out louder than before; because this importunity in asking is as acceptable to God, as it is usually displeasing to men. Heaven is to be gained by violence, and it is the violence of an unwearied perseverance in prayer must do the work.

But then care must be taken that it be attended with that other disposition, which, as our Saviour himself has intimated, gave the finishing stroke to the blind beggar's prayer; I mean, a hearty confidence in the goodness and power of Jesus Christ: for our Saviour having ordered him to be brought before him, and asked him what he desired, he answered, *Lord, that I may receive sight:* he neither doubted of his power nor good will; but being fully assured of both, he confidently presented his petition to him, which our Saviour immediately granted, saying, *Receive sight, thy faith has made thee whole.* The true secret, therefore, to obtain the cure of all our spiritual distempers, is to ask it with a hearty confidence in the grace and mercies of our Redeemer; as, on the contrary, one reason why our prayers prove often ineffectual, is because they are not attended with this holy disposition: for instead of placing all our trust in God, and making our addresses to him with an unshaken faith, and entire dependence on him, we either have a secret confidence in our own strength and industry, or a diffidence of his goodness, or the power of his grace.

It is true, if a sinner considers nothing but himself, the number and enormity of his sins past, and the present difficulties he has to struggle with, afford matter for such melancholy reflections as suffice to make him despond: But when he turns his eyes towards Jesus Christ, his Saviour and Redeemer, and considers him as an inexhaustible source of mercy, and vested with a power equal to his goodness, does he not then discover such solid grounds of hope, as will not only remove all diffidence and mistrust, but even encourage him to present his petitions with the most assured confidence of success? For may he not then justly reason thus with himself: It is true my sins are very great, but the mercies of my Redeemer are yet infinitely greater: my wounds are dangerous, but nothing is incurable to the hand of an omnipotent physician. Did he not come into the world to save sinners? My being then a sinner ought not to discourage me from hoping for a share in the blessings he came to bestow. Take courage then my soul; what reason hast thou to despair, unless it be of thy own strength? For thou canst do nothing of thyself; but despair not of his power or mercy, who is infinite in both. With these considerations, I say, a sinner must encourage himself to

approach with confidence to the throne of grace; and there continue to cry out for mercy, until the Divine Goodness, moved with his earnest prayer, speaks to his soul what Christ said to the blind man, *Thy faith has made thee sound.*

But when this happy hour is come, and that by God's blessing, he now finds a hatred to sin deeply fixed in his heart, his passions subdued so far as to be master of them, and himself walking steadily in the observance of God's holy law, which are the true symptoms of a sincere conversion, he must then follow his guide a few steps farther, and also imitate the grateful behaviour of the beggar after the recovery of his sight: which shall be the subject of the following Entertainment.

FORTY-EIGHTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE BEGGAR'S GRATITUDE TO CHRIST FOR HIS CURE.

And immediately he saw, and followed him, glorifying God.
Luke xviii. 43.

In my last discourse I drew some moral instructions from the blind beggar's behaviour, whereby he moved Christ to have compassion on him; and from the method he took to obtain that blessing, I marked out the most considerable steps by which a sinner must approach the throne of mercy, in order to obtain the grace of a perfect conversion, and the cure of his soul: but the gratitude of this poor beggar, set forth by the evangelist, in the praises he paid to God for the blessing he had received, and immediately *following Christ*, is so instructive a lesson for all sinners now delivered by God's grace from their former spiritual blindness, that I intend to make it the whole subject of this discourse.

The gospel then tells us, that as soon as the blind man had received sight, he immediately *followed Christ, praising and glorifying God:* he was so transported with the deep sense of the favour he had received, that he could neither think nor speak of anything else: he expressed his gratitude by words, *in praising and glorifying God;* and he shewed it in his actions, by immediately *following Christ;* and we cannot doubt but he proclaimed everywhere the praises of his benefactor, and retained as long as he lived

a grateful remembrance of the blessing he had bestowed upon him.

It is certain that to praise and glorify God for benefits received is so essential and indispensable a duty, that God demands it of us as a tribute due to him for all blessings whatsoever, whether spiritual or temporal: this appears plainly in St. Luke's relation of the *ten lepers* cured by Christ, and sent to shew themselves to the priest, as it was commanded by the law of Moses: however, though they were all cured, but one of the ten returned to glorify God, and pay his acknowledgments to the visible author of his cure: but hear how severely Christ censures the ingratitude of the other nine, in the following words: *Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? There was not found that returned to give glory to God, but only this one stranger.* Whence it is manifest, that those *nine lepers* were wanting to a duty which God required of them, and that our Saviour was highly offended at it.

Ingratitude is certainly a vice odious both to God and man: for no man bestows a favour but expects at least the return of a grateful heart, when no other can be made: and this debt is always exacted the most rigorously, because every man has it in his power to pay it, nay, the most generous and disinterested souls are apt to resent a neglect of it, because, it being the only reward they look for from men, if they be robbed of it they lose the whole fruit of their generosity in this world. Now if this be so between man and man, how much more justly must Almighty God, whose bounty to his creatures is infinite, be offended at the the sin of ingratitude; since it robs him not only of the glory due to him, and of which he is most jealous, but of the hearts of his creatures, which he claims as his peculiar right? It is for this reason that ingratitude is represented by spiritual writers as a sin, that particularly provokes God to draw back his liberal hand, and obstructs the overflowings of his bounties upon his creatures: whereas a heart mindful of favours received, and truly grateful for them, draws down a continual profusion of fresh blessings on the soul; and every act of praise and thanksgiving offered to God, is not only accepted by him in part of payment of the debt we owe him, but as a merit that moves him to repeat and continue his former liberality towards us.

But to give you a remarkable instance how acceptable

this tribute of a grateful heart is to Almighty God, and how exact he is in demanding it for all blessings, both spiritual and temporal, we read in the Old Testament, that he expressly commanded Moses to institute several solemn feasts to be kept yearly, in memory of the most signal favours he had bestowed upon his people, as their delivery from the *Egyptian bondage;* their miraculous passage through the Red Sea; his giving them the law upon Mount Sinai; and feeding them with manna in the desert; some of which miraculous food was also kept in the ark, to be a lasting memorial of that favour. Now all the ceremonies to be performed on those solemn days were exactly set down in the law of Moses, according to the directions he had received from God himself on the mount; and the principal drift of them was, to renew yearly in the people's mind the remembrance of the favours they received upon those days, and excite them to a grateful sense and acknowledgment of them: sacrifices of thanksgiving were offered, and canticles were sung to praise and glorify God, the author of those blessings; and lest the meaning of those ceremonies should ever be forgot, Moses expressly commands all parents to explain them to their children; that so not only the ceremonies themselves, but also the meaning of them, might be transmitted down from father to son, throughout all succeeding ages. *When thy son* (says he,) *shall ask thee to-morrow, saying, What mean these testimonies, and ceremonies, and judgments, which the Lord our God hath commanded us? Thou shalt say to him, We were bondsmen of Pharao in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand—and therefore the Lord commanded us to do all these ordinances.* Deut. vi. 20.

Thus you see the care God took to perpetuate the memory of his benefits, by commanding it to be handed down from generation to generation: and for what other end, than to perpetuate thereby the gratitude of his people, and make them sensible that, besides a lasting grateful heart, he expected from them, over and above, an annual tribute of solemn praise and thanksgiving for past favours? Nay, has not the Church the same in view in all the solemn feast of the law, those of Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and the feast of Corpus Christi? Are they not all ordained to refresh in our minds the remembrance of some signal blessing bestowed by God upon his Church, and thereby to

warm our hearts into a sense of gratitude to the author of those blessings? And what are the feasts of *martyrs* and *confessors*, but days of public thanksgiving to God for their victories and triumphs, obtained through the power of his holy grace? So that the most solemn institutions, both of the Old Testament and the Church of Christ, agree in this, that they all tend to inspire us with a grateful sense of God's benefit, and convince us that gratitude, praise and thanksgiving, are duties which God requires of us.

Now then, to return to the particular case of a sinner delivered from the bondage of sin, by the power and efficacy of God's holy grace; such a one must look upon himself so highly indebted to the divine goodness for this signal mercy, that he ought to retain a grateful remembrance of it as long as he lives; for whether he considers the value of the benefit itself, without which he would have been lost for ever; or his own unworthiness of it, in having so often provoked Almighty God to withdraw his mercies from him; or the unwearied patience of his deliverer, in having forborne so long with him; or, finally, the multitudes of those who are never favoured with it, but are justly permitted to live and die in their sins; every one of these circumstances lays an obligation of gratitude upon him, and renders a forgetfulness of it criminal in the sight of God.

Nor is this the only motive he has to induce him to it, but his perseverance in the grace to which he is restored depends in a great measure upon it: for as the grace of his conversion was a gratuitous gift of God, so his perseverance in it must be owing to a continuation of the same merciful bounty towards him; since it is an undoubted truth, that if the hand which healed him be not always ready to support him, he will most certainly fall back into his former unhappy state; so that it is his interest, as well as duty, to do his utmost to prevail with God, not to withdraw from him the merciful hand to which he owes his cure. And since there is nothing more effectual to draw down this blessing on him, than a lasting, grateful sense of the favour already received; his care must be to fix it deeply in his heart, to make it the daily subject of his thanksgiving, and never leave off praising and glorifying God with all the powers of his soul. It is true, there are many penitential duties from which a penitent may be justly exempted, as being consistent with his circumstances: for if he be poor, he cannot give alms; if

sickly, he cannot fast, nor practice any other mortifications, which perhaps would otherwise be proper; nor can he spend so much time in prayer as would be required, if the necessary duties of a lawful calling will not allow of it: all these then will sometimes admit of a dispensation; but the duty of gratitude admits of none: no pretence can exempt him from it; neither poverty, nor sickness, nor employments, are any hindrance to it, but rather furnish him with so many different occasions of practising this advice of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, chap. v. 18, *In all things, give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus.* So that when gratitude is thoroughly fixed in the heart of a penitent, it is as a perpetual sacrifice; it is a fire that never ceases to burn, what way soever the head or hands are employed; because the heart is equally free under all circumstances or engagements of the body.

Oh! how truly sensible was the royal penitent of this important duty, when he cried out, *Lord, thou hast broken my chains; to thee I will offer up a sacrifice of praise!* How was his heart inflamed, when he made this solemn declaration, *I will never cease to sing the mercies of the Lord!* With what feeling sense of gratitude did he breathe forth these pious words, *Bless the Lord, O my soul; and let all that is within me bless his holy name; Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all he hath done for thee; who forgiveth all thy iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with mercy and compassion!* Psal. cii. Thus spoke the royal penitent; and it is plain his very soul spoke in those words, it is plain those inflamed rhapsodies issued forth from the violent fire of love and gratitude burning in his soul, and were but the effusions and overflowings of a heart filled with the great ideas of the mercies he had received, and unable to contain itself. And, truly, we never read of any celebrated penitent or convert, but his gratitude to God for the mercy of his cure had not a remarkable part in the history of his life.

I will only mention one example, viz. that of St. Mary Magdalene, whose gratitude to Christ appears in every action and circumstance of her life, after her conversion; for from that moment she conceived so great a love for him, that her whole delight and satisfaction was to be near his sacred person: she seemed to make it her glory to set off

the triumph of her conqueror, by seeking all public occasions to pay her attendance on him: that action of her pouring a precious ointment upon him is commended by Christ himself, and by divine inspiration recorded in holy writ, to serve as an everlasting monument of her gratitude to him: she followed him in his greatest distress, even when he was forsaken by his disciples: she exposed herself to the insults of the brutal soldiers, in meeting him with weeping eyes when he was carrying his cross, and standing by him whilst he hung upon it: she was up early in the morning to seek her dear Lord, and came with spices and perfumes to embalm his body, without fear of the guards that were set to watch it; and not finding it in the sepulchre, she paid him what she could, the tribute of her tears: but when she could no longer enjoy the visible presence of the person who possessed her whole heart, she retired into a desert, sequestered from all human society, lest anything of this world should divert her thoughts from the only object that could give her any comfort or satisfaction.

Here we have, in the behaviour of a holy penitent, a perfect pattern of gratitude, the chief subject whereof was the first grace of her conversion; for which she thought herself bound to consecrate the whole remainder of her life to the service of her merciful benefactor. This leads me to the last instruction marked out, in the behaviour of the poor blind beggar after his cure; for as soon as he had received sight he immediately *followed Christ*, and by that professed himself to be one of his disciples. And so will a sinner truly converted do: he will follow Christ in the imitation of his virtues, and practice all christian duties that are suitable to his state. If he be poor, he will imitate the patience and humility of Christ, in submitting cheerfully to the hardships incident to that condition: if he has a family to provide for by his industry and labour, he will do it in the spirit of penance, and take for his pattern the painful and laborious life of Christ: if he be blessed with plenty, he will imitate his goodness, charity, and mercy, in relieving the distressed, and encourage himself to it by remembering these maxims of the gospel, that *what is done to the poor is done to Christ himself;* that *the merciful shall obtain mercy;* that *in what measure we shall measure out to others, in the same it shall be measured out to us:* finally, that alms given to the poor is but money deposited in their

hands, to purchase for him a treasure in the kingdom of Heaven.

He will also remember, that his condition is much like to that of a person newly recovered of some very great sickness; who is therefore obliged to continue a regular diet and exercise, for fear of a relapse. And this will determine him to a uniform practice of devotion, and a christian manner of employing his time: it will convince him of the necessity of daily prayer; of having frequent recourse to the fountains of grace, and nourishing his devotion, with reading good books: for whoever proposes to himself the exact observance of God's holy law, and takes it seriously to heart, as a condition necessary to salvation, will, of course, be solicitous to inform himself of the means in order to it: and therefore when he finds, upon enquiry, that prayer and the sacraments are the most powerful means to attain to this great end, as being ordained by Christ himself, he will infallibly conclude, that he cannot pretend to be in earnest, if he either lays aside those means, or is notoriously negligent in the use of them.

Lastly, he will be convinced that he has an obligation, over and above what many others have, to be always a faithful servant and follower of Christ, by reason of his past sins: for he has been a rebel against him, and by his bad example has perhaps drawn others into the same guilt. What other compensation then can be made him, for having graciously received him into favour after the many treasons committed against him, than to do what he can to repair the scandals of his life past, and promote the interest of so merciful a sovereign, by appearing now as resolute and zealous in his service, as he was before an enemy to it: he ought therefore never to lose the remembrance of past sins, but keep them always in view, as the royal prophet did; to serve him as a spur to excite him to a more than ordinary zeal and fervour, in every thing relating to God's service; the effect whereof will be, to edify his neighbour as much now by his sober, regular, and Christian behaviour, as he disedified him before by his irregularities and disorders. Thus will he become a true and faithful follower of Christ, a disciple worthy of so good a master, an imitator of him in this life, and a partaker of his eternal crown hereafter.

FORTY-NINTH ENTERTAINMENT.

IT IS OUR DUTY TO LOVE OUR ENEMIES.

Love your enemies ; do good to them that hate you. Matt. v. 44.

These words being precise and clear, admit of no interpretation in favour of corrupt nature ; which, if it pretends to plead for itself, by alleging the impossibility of loving an enemy, St. Jerome has already answered it in his comment upon this very text, saying, *that the things commanded by Christ, are perfect indeed, but not impossible :* which, in reference to the duty in question, he proves from the practice, *first*, of David returning good for evil to Saul, who thirsted after his blood ; 2*dly*, of St. Stephen praying for those that stoned him ; 3*dly*, of St. Paul wishing to be anathematized for the sake of his persecutors ; and lastly, from the example of Christ himself, whose practice as well as doctrine, as to what regards the duty of forgiving and loving our enemies, shall be the subject of this Entertainment.

There is no duty in the whole gospel either inculcated with more frequent repetitions, or recommended by more illustrious examples, from the life and actions of our Saviour Jesus Christ, than of love and charity to our enemies : to make this evident, let us first examine what he has taught relating to this subject : for whether we look into the first or last sermon preached by him, the one upon the mount, the other at his last supper, we shall find this doctrine so amply treated, both in the one and the other, that there is no room to doubt but our Saviour's intention, in this beginning and ending his preaching with it, was to give his disciples, both an early tincture, and lasting impression of it. And truly, considering, what utter strangers the Jews were to the doctrine of pardoning injuries, and loving their enemies, it needed all the recommendation possible to bring it into credit.

For the clearer understanding whereof you must know, that as in many other particulars, so in reference to brotherly love and charity, the Jewish doctors had very much corrupted the Mosaic law, by imposing their own interpretations and traditions for law upon the people. As for in-

stance; the fifth commandment forbids *murder*, as a heinous crime, and it was punished with death: but, because the usual steps to it, as *anger, hatred, enmities,* and the like were not forbid in express terms, they concluded, that provided they but kept their hands free from blood, the forementioned passions might be entertained in their hearts, and expressed in words, without any breach of the commandment.

Now to condemn this abuse and misinterpretation of God's law, our Saviour, in his sermon on the mount, delivers the following maxims, thus: *You have heard that it was said to them of old, Thou shalt not kill; but I say to you, that whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire.* Matt. v. 21, 22. And to express the hatred Almighty God has of enmities and quarrels, he proceeds in this manner: *If therefore thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee, leave there thy offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother.* Matt. v. 23, 24. Here you see Christ prefers the duty of charity before sacrifice; which though it be the highest worship we can pay to God, yet we are positively commanded to forbear it till the duty of charity to our neighbour be first fully satisfied.

The second corruption of the Mosaic law, relating to this subject, and corrected by Christ, was this: the law was very severe in all cases of violence committed upon any one's person, and demanded *eye for eye, tooth for tooth.*— Now this law of retaliation was doubtless only intended as a rule to public ministers of justice to act by: but the Jewish doctors, by their corrupt interpretations, had very much enlarged the meaning of it, and made it a rule not only for public justice, but private revenge in many cases. Wherefore to remedy this abuse our Saviour gave the following instructions: *You have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, not to resist evil, but if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other; and if a man will contend with thee in judgment, and take away thy coat, let go thy cloak also unto him; and whosoever will force thee one mile, go with him other two.* Matt. v. 38, 39, 40, 41. These

are the words of Christ; which are so far from allowing us to retaliate injuries, that they expressly direct us to encounter the malice of our enemies only with the arms of patience; and to purchase peace and charity with our neighbour, even with the prejudice of our temporal interest or conveniencies.

Lastly, the Jews had a current tradition amongst them, that they might lawfully hate their enemies; because God having commanded them, in the 19th chapter of Leviticus, to love their friends and brethren, without laying any express command upon them relating to their enemies; the Jewish doctors, interpreting this law according to the inclinations of corrupt nature, concluded positively from it, that they might lawfully bear a hatred to their enemies, and do them any mischief, provided they kept within the law. And therefore Christ, to abolish this error, set the following rules, in contradiction to the corrupt tradition of the Jews. *You have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thy enemy: but I say to you love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you; that you may be the children of your Father, who is in Heaven; who maketh his sun to rise upon the good and bad; and raineth upon the just and the unjust; for if you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? and if you salute your brethren only, what do you more? do not also the heathens this? Be you therefore perfect, as also your Heavenly Father is perfect.* Matt. v. 43, 44. &c.

Here our Saviour marks out clearly, both the *persons* in relation to whom, and the *manner* how the duty of charity is to be practised. As to the persons to whom we owe this duty, they are particularly specified by Christ, viz. They that *hate, curse, slander*, and *persecute us*. In a word, all those that are our professed enemies: and as to the manner how we must behave ourselves towards them, our Saviour tells us, that we must *love* them, *do good* to them, *salute* them, that is, pay them all the customary duties of civility; and finally, *pray* for them: And upon these terms promises to own us for the children of that Father, *who makes his sun rise upon the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and unjust.*

Now who would not think but that Christ had here sufficiently declared himself upon this subject, both to shew

the importance of it, and imprint a lasting remembrance of it in all men's hearts? However he resumes it again in the very next chapter, which is but a continuation of the same sermon: For having in this chapter taught that form of prayer, which is commonly called our Lord's Prayer, he takes occasion to enlarge upon the fifth petition of it, and tells his disciple, *that if they forgive men their offences your Heavenly Father will forgive you also your offences; but if you will not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your offences.* Matt. vi. 15. And it is remarkable, that this is the only petition our Saviour thought fit to enlarge upon, and draw instructive consequences from; though he had already explained himself so fully on this subject, and the natural order of connection, led him rather to some reflections upon the concluding petition, than that which was interrupted by it, and separated from the following discourse.

Thus then you see our Saviour's early care to instruct us in the duty of charity, by his repeating it so often in the very first sermon he ever preached. However since there is a certain time in which men generally utter those things that are nearest to their hearts, and of which they desire to leave the deepest impressions, (the time I speak of is when they are upon the point of leaving this world, for then their words carry a particular weight, and their commands challenge the most religious observance,) this time our Saviour chose to resume the subject he had already so often enlarged upon; intending doubtless thereby to give us to understand, that the commands he then laid upon us ought to be regarded as the last will and testament of our dying Lord and Master.

For it was at his last supper and in his last sermon, perhaps an hour or two before the first scene of his passion; I mean his agony in the garden, when every word he spoke was like a fiery dart shot from an inflamed heart, and his sacred soul was burning with love and charity for his enemies; it was then, I say, he was pleased to deliver to us the precept of charity; which, to render it more solemn, he ushered in with this preparatory discourse: *Little children, yet a little while I am with you: You shall seek me, whither I go you cannot come.* John xiii. 33. Having rendered his apostles attentive with this surprising preamble, he proceeds thus: *A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another, as I have loved you.* John

xiii. 34. He calls it a new commandment, as being in a particular manner the precept of the new law, and the manner of his having loved, being also wholly new.

But who does not plainly see, that the motive of our Saviour's making choice of that time for the delivering of it, was to recommend and endear it to us? The very words of his preamble, give sufficient grounds for this reflection. *My little children, I have a small time to be with you.*— As if he had said, I am now upon the point of parting from you; wherefore, if I may justly challenge any return of gratitude for all the favours you have already received, or hope still from me, I conjure you to lay up in your hearts this last will and command of your dying Father, viz. *That ye love one another, as I have loved you.* However, he repeats it soon after in terms still more pressing, thus; *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.* John xv. 12. Here he calls it *his own commandment*, by way of excellency above all his other precepts; and so St. John the Evangelist, his faithful interpreter, was always wont to call it, *the precept of the Lord;* yet our Saviour thought fit to repeat it even a third time, in these terms: *These things I command you, that you love one another.* John xv. 17.

Was there ever a precept delivered in so pressing a manner, or in circumstances that could give a greater weight and authority to it? However, lest anything should be wanting to induce us to a faithful practice of it, our Saviour took care to propose the most endearing motives to oblige us to it; for he had no sooner declared, that *it was his command, that we should love one another as he had loved us*, but he forthwith added, *by this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.* John xiii. 35. And having again repeated the same command, he again repeats the same engaging motive, in a more tender expression, thus: *you are my friends, if you do the things that I command you.* John xv. 14.

Can any one after this have so little regard to the duty he owes his Heavenly Father, as to harbour an ill will to his neighbour? Or can the heart of any Christian be so hardened with malice, as not to be softened into a compliance by such endearing motives, nor prevailed upon to depose all manner of rancour or malice, even to the worst of enemies? For we must not think that Christ, in command-

ing us to love one another, meant only to oblige us to love our friends: the very word of the precept excludes any such interpretation. *I command you*, (says Christ) *that you love one another as I loved you.* Now he loved us when we were his enemies; and loved us so as to shed his blood for us. We cannot therefore love as he did, unless we love all without exception; and the meaning of the precept manifestly imports, that as he loved us in spite of all our sins and imperfections, as he loved us notwithstanding the ingratitude with which he knew we should repay his infinite goodness; finally, as he loved us when we were effectually his enemies, so we must love one another, without distinction of friend or foe, benefactor or persecutor. In a word, love is a debt we owe to all mankind, and which no provocation of ingratitude, injuries, or affronts can ever cancel. This is manifestly the doctrine of Christ, which he took care to establish from the very beginning of his preaching, and bequeathed to us in his last will and testament.

But though his tongue had been silent, his actions speak loud enough to inform us of our duty: for let us but consider him in every part of his life, and trace his actions and sufferings from the stable of Bethlehem to Mount Calvary, and we shall find them all but one continued practice of love and charity to his enemies: did he not come down from Heaven, and take upon him our mortal flesh for love of his enemies? Were not all his voluntary sufferings, the poverty, humiliations, and hardships he endured at Bethlehem, in Egypt, and at Nazareth; were they not I say, all undertaken for love of his enemies.

But when he now began to manifest himself to the world by his doctrines and miracles, what contradictions, revilings, persecutions, and affronts did he not immediately meet with from his enemies amongst the Jews, being continually traduced by them for being an *impostor, magician, drunkard, sabbath-breaker, disturber of the public peace*, and what not? And how did Christ behave himself on these occasions? How did he revenge himself of his enemies? St. Peter tells us in these few words, *When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not.* Oh, no; it was not our Saviour's method to recriminate upon his adversaries, or pay them in their own coin, by returning injuries for injuries, ill language for ill

language, reproaches for reproaches: he had no other way of revenge than by doing good for evil, and heaping favours on those that persecuted and reviled him; so that all the ill usage he received from the Jews could not hinder him from spending three whole years amongst them, in continual endeavours to procure them everlasting good: he spent the day in preaching to them the word of life, and the night in sending up his prayers to Heaven in their behalf: he wrought all sorts of miracles amongst them, curing their sick, raising their dead, healing their lepers, restoring their deaf, dumb, and blind to their perfect senses, and, in a word, doing good to every one that stood in need of his help; and all this for the sake of people the most ungrateful that ever lived upon the face of the earth; and who, he knew, would at last repay all his favours by a most ignominious death.

And it is particularly in this last scene of his life we ought to behold him with astonishment and admiration: First, then, let us consider him at his last supper, and see him there prostrate at the traitor's feet, washing and wiping them, with the same marks of love and tenderness, as if he were one of his truest friends. Oh, what a confounding sight is this, to those who resent a real or imaginary injury to that degree, as even to refuse to speak a friendly word, or pay the ordinary duties of civility to the supposed authors of it! Proud worms of the earth! Can we see without blushing the Son of God prostrate before a traitor, endeavouring to gain him by the most astonishing submissions: can we, I say, see this, and at the same time harbour a resentment in our breasts, or think it beneath us to stoop to anything to gain our brother? How will this action of Christ confound us at the day of judgment, if we make it not now our pattern! This certainly was such an astonishing act of submission, goodness, and charity, that nothing can surpass it.

However, let us still go farther with him, and follow him to the garden of Gethsemani; there we shall see him kissing and saluting Judas with the name of friend, and immediately after restoring the ear of Malchus, one of those that came to seize him. Next, let us accompany him to the palaces of Annas and Caiphas: in the one he received a blow on the cheek; in the other his enemies both buffeted him, and spit him in the face: but did he return blow for blow,

or affront for affront? Nothing less: *As a lamb*, (says Isaiah,) *brought to the slaughter, and as a sheep before the shearers, he was dumb, and opened not his mouth.* Lastly, let us accompany him to Mount Calvary, where we shall neither find him heaping curses on his enemies, nor calling down vengeance upon them; but, on the contrary, sending up to Heaven his prayers for them; earnestly supplicating his Father to forgive them; nay, even apologizing for them, as far as truth would permit; and, lastly, dying for them.

Thus we see in how eminent a manner Christ practised what he taught: we see his doctrine and example are exactly uniform, and conspire with a wonderful harmony to instruct us in our duty, and oblige us in the performance of it. But if no sense of duty, though pressed upon us with the united force of the plainest precepts and most illustrious examples, be powerful enough to work upon our stubborn and rebellious hearts, the consideration of self-interest ought at least to prevail upon us: we must therefore considsr, that *according to the measure with which we shall measure to others, it will also be measured to us:* if, for some injury received, we harbour malice in our hearts against the author of it, we shut up the bowels of divine mercy against us: but if we be easy in forgiving one another, the mercy we shew him will draw down mercy from Heaven upon us.

FIFTIETH ENTERTAINMENT.

IT IS OUR INTEREST TO FORGIVE AND LOVE OUR ENEMIES.

Thou wicked servant, I forgive thee all the debt, because thou besoughtest me: shouldst not thou then have had compassion also on thy fellow-servant? Matt. xviii. 32.

The main drift of the parable, whence I have taken my text, is to convince us, that it is our interest, as well as duty to pardon injuries: for the servant mentioned in it being summoned to make his accounts, was found to be indebted *ten thousand talents* to his lord; who, upon his humble request that he would have patience with him, forgave him the whole debt; but because he refused, soon after, to forgive his fellow-servant the trifling debt of a *hundred pence*, his lord, justly moved to indignation with his unworthy behaviour, condemned him to be delivered to the tormenters, till he should pay all that was due to him.

This is the substance of the parable, in the moral whereof we may read the just punishment of those who die without charity; for there is no mercy after death for them that shew no mercy in this life: so that whilst they refuse to forgive and love their enemies, they become the worst of enemies to themselves. Having therefore proved, in the foregoing discourse, that it is the indispensable duty of every Christian to forgive and love his enemies, the subject of this shall be to shew, that it is likewise his truest interest to do it.

It is certainly every man's interest to obtain the discharge of an immense debt, by forgiving a trifle: now this is our very case, in reference to Almighty God on the one hand, and our neighbour on the other: for if we consider the multitude and grievousness of our sins, and the punishment due to them, we shall find ourselves in the unhappy condition of the servant, who owed *ten thousand talents* to his lord: but as he readily forgave him the whole debt upon his earnest supplication, so Almighty God is ready to shew us the same mercy, provided we imitate, in some measure, his goodness, compassionating such of our fellow-servants as are indebted to us for some offence committed against us; which if compared to our grievous offences against Almighty God, will not even hold the proportion of an *hundred pence* to the vast debt of *ten thousand talents:* yet, upon these easy terms, God's infinite goodness offers us the pardon of our sins: but the condition is indispensable, and if it be not heartily and sincerely complied with, we become accountable to God for the whole debt we owe him, and may read our own fate in the sentence pronounced against the hard-hearted servant in the parable, which our Saviour concludes with these remarkable words: *So also shall my heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts.* Matt. xviii. 35.

Whoever therefore has recourse to the sacred tribunal of penance, in order to obtain the pardon of sins, though he seemingly brings all the dispositions requisite to qualify him for that blessing; if he comes with a hatred in his heart to any person in the world, he is utterly unworthy and incapable of the mercy he pretends to; his repentance is a mockery; his confession is void; his absolution null; and instead of discharging his debt, he only inflames the reckoning, and returns back with the additional guilt of

sacrilege, over and above his other sins: so that whoever bears a hatred to his neighbour is in a damnable state; and if he continues and dies in it, there is no room for mercy for him; God will, in this respect, deal with us just as we deal with our neighbour; if we forgive we shall be forgiven: but if we entertain deep and lasting resentments of injuries received, God will also remember the injustices we have committed against him.

This is clearly insinuated in the very prayer composed by Christ himself, and which we daily offer up to God for the pardon of our sins: for in this prayer we beg of God *to forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.* Which in reference to one that bears hatred in his heart, is either mocking God, or cursing himself. For it is begging God's hatred instead of reconciliation, and bespeaking a denial of the pardon he seemingly sues for. This, I say, is the true meaning of this prayer, when it is pronounced by a tongue that holds a correspondence with a heart envenomed with hatred to any one: a person under these unhappy circumstances cries out for justice instead of mercy, for vengeance instead of compassion; and he needs not doubt, but if he persists in that unchristian disposition, his prayer will be heard according to its true meaning; and God will forgive him his trespasses, just as he forgives them that trespass against him.

The second reason, to shew how much it is our interest to forgive and love our enemies, is because whoever has not charity in his heart loses the fruit of all his other virtues. For charity is not only the queen and mother, but the very life and soul of all Christian virtues; so that without it they are dead, and can bring forth no fruit conducing to life everlasting. This is the doctrine of St. Paul, 1 Cor. xiii. *If I speak,* (says he,) *with tongues of men and angels, and have not charity; I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal; and if I should have prophecy, and should know all mysteries, and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing; and if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burnt, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.* Thus St. Paul; who leaves no room to doubt of what I have said, viz. that without charity, and by consequence without the love of our enemies,

which is a breach of it, all other virtues profit nothing to salvation. Devotion without charity, leads to hypocrisy and delusion: Sacrifice and fasting are of no merit without it; and the very greatest austerities and sufferings will not entitle us to any reward in Heaven, if charity be not in the heart. Nay, though it should effectually happen, what St. Paul supposes, that a person should lay down his life, and be burnt alive upon the account of religion, if he should prove so unhappy, as at the same time to harbour in his breast a secret hatred to his neighbour, the flames that should consume his body, would not rescue his wretched soul from the everlasting flames of Hell.

It is true, it is more probable that Almighty God would in that case rather permit him to renounce his faith, and turn barefaced apostate, than to suffer such an hypocrite to appear a champion in his cause; as Baronius relates, that it once happened at Antioch, to an unfortunate priest called Sapricius, who had contracted a great friendship with one Nicephorus, a layman. But as it often comes to pass that the greatest friendships turn into the greatest hatred; these two friends became such mortal enemies, that they could not endure to see or speak to one another; and thus continued for a long time, till Nicephorus, being disturbed with it in his conscience, both employed the mediation of friends, and went himself to Sapricius to make his peace with him: but Sapricius, hardened with hatred, rejected all terms of reconciliation.

It happened in the mean time that the emperor then reigning, raised a violent persecution against the Church; and great numbers of Christians being every where taken up and imprisoned, Sapricius was taken amongst others at Antioch, and accused before the governor of that city of being a Christian and a Priest; both which he boldly confessed, and upon his refusing to offer incense to the idols, was cast into a dungeon, and condemned to the torture, which he suffered with great courage, and was thereupon sentenced to lose his head.

As he was going to the place of execution, Nicephorus, who had been informed of what had passed, ran in haste to meet him upon the way; and falling prostrate at his feet, beseeched him with many tears to forgive him, and be reconciled to him: but Sapricius, turning away his head, went on without taking notice of him: Nicephorus being

extremely troubled at it, and having his heart full of true Christian concern for the imminent danger Sapricius was in of perishing eternally, took a shorter way, and met him again upon his knees, humbly beseeching him for Jesus Christ's sake, for whom he was going to shed his blood, to forget past injuries, and be reconciled to him. But Sapricius went on as before, without giving any mark of his being better affected towards him.

Being come to the place of execution, here it was that Almighty God, who had hitherto followed him with his holy inspirations, withdrew his grace from him, and abandoned him to his own weakness; for when the executioner was just going to cut off his head, his heart on a sudden failed him; and he who had before endured the greatest torments, was now overcome with the fear of an easy death; and applying himself to the officer that was present to oversee the execution, told him he was ready to obey the emperor's command, if he would give him his life, which was immediately granted. Whereupon Nicephorus, who beheld with a mixture of grief and astonishment the visible justice of God, in the sudden fall of Sapricius, being at that instant moved with a secret impulse from Heaven, stepped forward of his own accord into the list, declared himself a Christian, was thereupon immediately sentenced to have his head cut off, and in reward of his charity carried away the glorious crown of martyrdom, which the other had justly forfeited for his want of charity and hardness of heart.

This is a terrible example. A priest, a confessor, a martyr, as we may call him, if we consider the torments he had suffered, utterly abandoned by God, for no other apparent sin than that of refusing to be reconciled to his enemy. An example, which ought to terrify those who entertain lasting resentments in their hearts: for certainly never had any man stood fairer for a crown of martyrdom, nor came nearer to the brink of eternal bliss, and lost both the one and the other, than the unfortunate Sapricius: we may justly consider him as a ship that returns richly laden from a long and dangerous voyage, and is sunk in the very harbour: though we may say more properly, that his hatred to Nicephorus, *turned all his gold and silver* (as Isaiah expresses it) *into dross.* This was the *rust*, that tarnished all the lustre and beauty of the glorious sufferings he had undergone; it was the *moth* that consumed and destroyed all

the precious ornaments of his soul, and made them of no value in the sight of God: so that although he had effectually received the stroke of death, unless Almighty God had first changed the disposition of his heart, his soul had nevertheless been lost for all eternity. But it pleased God to prevent it by permitting him to fall visibly: both for his Church's sake, and to instruct every Christian, that even the most heroic virtues in appearance will hold no weight in the balance of the sanctuary, unless they be perfected by charity, which is the accomplishment of the law, and gives every virtue its full value.

Let us not then delude ourselves with flattering appearances of a firm faith or zeal for religion, or strong fancied fervors, or of our being perhaps exempt from what is openly scandalous and criminal: for if we harbour in our hearts a hatred to any person whatsoever, we are in the state of mortal sin, and all our pretended innocence and faith will not save us. And truly, when the resentment of an injury, whether real or supposed, comes to such a height as to cause a rancour in the mind, and a sensible alteration in our behaviour towards the party concerned, so that we can neither converse with him, nor speak friendly to him, nor pay him the ordinary duties of civility, we have reason to suspect our souls are venomed with it; especially if it becomes a lasting disposition.

If you say it is not always in our power to overcome resentments; and injuries will sometimes affect us very sensibly, whether we will or no; nay, there are even certain natural antipathies, which we have not in our power to correct: I answer, that a resentment or antipathy is only sinful as far as it is voluntary. Nay, both the one and the other are inconsistent with charity in the heart, and we may always make this favourable judgment of them, when they have no influence upon our words or actions, to the prejudice of the party whom they regard: for if in spite of such resentments or antipathies, we not only keep a bridle upon our tongues when we have an itching to say some spiteful thing of the party concerned; but are ever ready to speak well of him, and do him such good offices as occasion shall present, we may then safely judge, that being thus overruled by charity, they are purely the effect of nature, and the will has no share in them.

Whence it follows, *first*, that there is a large difference

between the *love of charity*, and a *natural affection*. The first regards our neighbour, precisely as he bears the image of God in his soul; and this love we owe to all mankind: the second regards him only as he has some qualities agreeable to us; which therefore is usually confined to a very narrow compass.

Hence it follows, 2*dly*, that the love we owe our neighbour, whether friend or foe, consists precisely in a sincere desire and inclination of the heart to do him good for God's sake. And since this inclination is consistent, as I have said, with an involuntary resentment of injuries received, it is evident that the law of charity is not violated by it, as long as we act in contradiction to it.

However, we ought to be always very jealous of any such resentment; we ought to regard it as a dangerous temptation, and be upon our guard against it, because the heart may be envenomed by it; as we must judge it is, when instead of using the obvious means to overcome it, we rather cherish and indulge it, by frequently musing upon, and discoursing with a certain bitterness, of the injury that has been done us: when we take a pleasure to feel the offender traduced, or feel a certain secret joy at any cross that happens to him, but especially when we refuse to make some reasonable advances towards a hearty reconciliation with him, for these are all strong symptoms of a settled hatred; and our saying in this case, *I forgive him, I wish him no harm, I am in charity with him*, is no more than a mere form of speech, which signifies nothing, and serves only to increase the difficulty of our cure, by silencing in some measure the murmurs of an uneasy conscience, and flattering ourselves into a false security: for until our actions and behaviour give testimony that we are truly in charity, there lies a snake in the grass, and we carry a viper in our breasts that will sting us to death: *For whoever loves not*, (says St. John) *remains in death.*

I own, to love an enemy, and do good to those that hate and persecute us, is a hard lesson to practice. But since it is a lesson taught by Christ himself, since without it no pardon of sins can be obtained, and all other virtues are but so many useless ornaments, it is as indispensable as it is hard: and therefore whatever the difficulties are, they must be overcome; for to die without charity, is to die in a damnable state; and since it is so difficult a lesson to learn, we have

but little encouragement to hope to practice it at the hour of death, if we neglect it now. For passions once deeply sunk into the soul are not to be thrown off on a sudden; so that the same hatred which accompanies us to our death-beds, will in all probability follow us a step farther, and bear us company to the grave; there being scarce any passion that, when it is indulged, takes a deeper root than that of hatred and aversion. It is easily remedied, if due care be taken in the beginning; but a long continuance renders it very hard to be cured.

Let us beseech Almighty God to preserve us from so dangerous an evil, and fill our hearts with such an abundant charity, as may at the last hour entitle our souls to the blessed joys above: where charity reigns in her full lustre, uniting all the blessed souls to Jesus Christ, and in him to one another, with a pure, disinterested, and unchangeable love.

FIFTY-FIRST ENTERTAINMENT.

THE MEANS TO PRESERVE PEACE WITH MEN, BY AVOIDING CONTENTIOUSNESS.

If any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom. 1 Cor. xi. 16.

It appears plainly from these words of St. Paul, that the spirit of contention is not a Christian spirit; and the reason is clear; because charity, which is a virtue peculiarly recommended by Christ, cannot possibly be long maintained, either in a state or private family, where the spirit of contention reigns.

Now this unchristian spirit is principally kept up by an indiscreet forwardness, either in thwarting men's humours, or contradicting their opinions; especially when they are espoused with heat. We are often faulty in not having a due regard to the temper of those we converse with; and being more intent upon gratifying our own humours, than managing, with a charitable tenderness, those of our neighbour: we are forward in contradicting his opinions, because we abound too much in our own sense: and we oppose his passions with heat, because we are not masters of our own: and it is from this indiscretion that numberless disputes, contentions, and animosities arise; which therefore we are bound to avoid as much as it is possible, in order to preserve

peace and charity with all men: but especially with such as have some near relation to us, either by proximity of blood, or neighbourhood, or by living under the same roof where God's providence has allotted us our station.

The subject then of this and the following discourse shall be, to shew how wary and circumspect we ought to be not to give offence, by an over-fondness of our own opinions, or an indiscreet forwardness in contradicting those of our neighbour.

It is a common weakness to be fond of our own opinions, and desirous to have them approved by others. We are fond of them, just as parents are of their children, because we consider them as our own product, or a part of ourselves; and we desire to have them approved by others, because this is a kind of conquest which flatters our vanity. Hence it is that all contradiction is more or less disagreeable; because, whoever contradicts another does not only rob him of this pleasure, but pretends to a superiority of knowledge or judgment over him, at least as to the point in question; which being a sort of humiliation to man's natural pride, cannot but mortify him is some degree; but it is still more mortifying, according as the temper or circumstances of the person contradicted render him more sensible of it, and, by consequence, less able to bear it: for some are more capricious, or stiffer in their opinions than others; and therefore less capable of bearing a contradiction.

This is the case, *first*, of those who are naturally of a strong imagination. For anything strongly fancied fills a man's mind, so as to leave no room for reason to disabuse him, though he be ever so much in the wrong; so that such a one is very like a person placed so near to any object that he can see nothing beyond it.

It is, 2*dly*, the case of persons possessed with any opinion, wherein the interest or reputation of a party is concerned; for opinions of this nature are generally espoused with heat; and to contradict them is the same as declaring war.

3*dly*, It is the case of those who have been from their infancy brought up in any opinion; which seldom fails to give so strong a prepossession in favour of it, that to contradict it has generally no other effect than to exasperate the party so prepossessed, and give him a very ill opinion

both of the judgment and good manners of him who declares himself against it.

Lastly, there are certain worldly advantages; as *quality*, *riches*, *power*, and the like, which contribute very much to make men positive and stiff in their opinions; because these persons being generally flattered by those that are about them, and unaccustomed to contradiction, they contract a certain habit of thinking themselves in the right, because they are seldom or never advertised that they are in the wrong: so that they look upon a man who takes the liberty to contradict them, as an invader of a right of which they had a long and undisputed possession.

Now though we ought not to attribute this weakness to any person in particular, unless we cannot possibly avoid making such a judgment of him; yet it is adviseable to behave ourselves so towards the generality of men, as if they were really guilty of it. This precaution can never hurt, and it may do good on many occasions; because, by means of it we may insinuate ourselves into the affection, and gain the esteem of those with whom we are united in society; which will naturally dispose them to hearken favourably to such advice as, upon occasion, will be useful to them; whereas, if we shock them by an indiscreet forwardness in opposing their sentiments, besides the heats and breach of charity it may occasion, it cannot but lessen our credit with them, which we should always endeavour to keep up, not so much for our own as for our neighbour's sake; that is, to render ourselves capable of doing him good, which we can never hope to do if we become disagreeable to him, since the very best advice loses it fruit when it comes from a person whom we neither love nor esteem.

I know the common pretence of those who are of a thwarting temper is, that it is a charity we owe to our neighbour to disabuse him when he is in an error: I grant the maxim is good in general, but the use of it is very nice and difficult in practice, and requires several conditions to make it a real act of that charity, which they pretend to take for their guide: 1*st*, They must be very sure of the main point, viz. that the opinion they oppose is an error; 2*d*. that their motive in opposing it is no other than the good of their neighbour, which evidently supposes a probability of success; and 3*d*, that it is an error of such dangerous consequence as ought to be removed. Now, when

all these conditions are carefully observed, then we may safely say it is charity, and not the spirit of contradiction that moves us. I shall touch briefly upon each particular.

First, then, to make charity a just pretence to contradict any man, especially with the hazard of engaging in a hot dispute, we ought to be very sure of his being in an error. Now to be sure of this, it suffices not to have seemingly reason on our side, but there ought to be, in a manner, full evidence for it: for if this be wanting, it is rationally to be supposed that our neighbour has as much appearance of reason for his opinion as we pretend to have for our own; and where there are reasons on both sides, the matter in question is at most doubtful, and either side may be either in the right or wrong: in which case, it is a presumption to give a positive preference to our own opinion, and conclude peremptorily that a man is in the wrong, because he sees not things in the same light as we do. For a person truly humble is rather diffident of his own judgment, and will sooner choose to err by thinking himself in the wrong, when he has the truth of the question on his side, than by not yielding to it when it is against him.

But supposing now that there is clear evidence that our neighbour is in error, the next thing to be considered, before we undertake to contradict him, is, whether it be an error of that consequence as ought to be removed: that is, whether there be danger of some considerable prejudice, either to his spiritual or temporal good, if he should persist in it: for in this case it is certainly a charitable office to endeavour to disabuse him: but if no such danger appears, and neither his reputation nor interest of soul or body be concerned, it is generally better to leave him in possession of his error than hazard a dispute about it. The reason hereof is clear; because, though truth be always a real good, and error a sort of evil, yet if the remedy be dangerous, or even worse than the evil we pretend to cure by it, it is both charitable and prudent to forbear using it; considering especially, that by this moderation in overlooking trivial mistakes, we become more capable of serving our neighbour on occasions of greater importance.

Our Saviour himself has sufficiently recommended this rule by his own practice: for though he was full of all truth, and had a perfect knowledge of everything, he only delivered these sacred truths in which God's honour and

the good of souls were concerned: It is true he discovered the falsehood of some apocryphal traditions of the Pharisees, because the more ignorant sort were misled by them, to the prejudice of their salvation: but, as to errors in *philosophy*, *history*, *physic*, *eloquence*, or other human sciences, though they were numberless, and perfectly known by him, he neither undertook to confute any of them himself, nor ever charged his apostles to do it; but left every man the freedom of his own way of thinking, though ever so much subject to error and mistakes.

Now since we are bound to follow the example of Christ and his apostles, it is evident, that in matters of no consequence, it is better to let an opinion prevail, though ever so erroneous, than to hazard the ordinary heats and contentions of a dispute to confute it; because the good we aim at in endeavouring to rectify a man's intellect, bears no proportion to the evil we hazard in exasperating his mind, and peace is always preferable to a trivial truth. Is there not, many times, as much noise and contest about mere trifles, as if the fundamentals of religion were at stake? And what is the source of all this heat and strife, in which charity is so often most grievously wounded? Zeal for truth is the usual pretence, but pride is but too often the real cause. We cannot bear, without some resentment, to see men differ from us in their opinions; and the ground of this resentment is not so much because their opinions are contrary to the truth, as because they are contrary to our judgment; which we look upon as undervalued by not being submitted to.

There is, I know not how, a secret ambition in our nature to over-top others, even in the most trivial things; which St. Austin calls *superbæ victoriæ*, proud victories, and of which he accuses himself in his *confessions*: but no conquest flatters our vanity with a more sensible pleasure than that of knowledge or understanding; and I doubt not but it happens many times that a person dictating in a private assembly, and fancying himself to be the oracle of the company, is guilty of a deeper pride, than a general at the head of a victorious army: this desire of surpassing in knowledge, is amongst your scholars called *emulation*, and encouraged by their masters as a spur to learning; but I fear it proves too often the nourishment of a pride, which sticks to them as long as they live; and renders them, by

reason of their positiveness and arrogance, both insupportable to men, and hateful to God.

But how far soever this reflection may be true, it is certain, that the desire of domineering over other men's judgments is a prevailing passion in our nature; and therefore when we find ourselves disappointed in not meeting with all the deference and submission we expect, we take it as an affront done to our judgment; we grow waspish and impatient, and seek immediately to revenge ourselves, by mustering up all our reasons to convince him that we understand things better than he: not that we are concerned for his being in an error, but our whole concern is to do justice to ourselves, by forcing him, by the dint of argument, to see and own it: and whereas we ought to rest satisfied with the consciousness of having truth on our side, we seek, moreover, the malignant pleasure of mortifying our neighbour, extorting from him an acknowledgment that we are in the right, and he is in the wrong.

This is the usual source of contradiction, and the root of that heat and contention about things of no moment, which seldom fails to wound charity, and often utterly destroys it: but put the case now, that there is not only clear evidence of our neighbour's being in an error, but that it is an error of such consequence as will be prejudicial to him if he persists in it: the question then is, how far the duty of charity obliges us to use endeavours to undeceive him? Now, it is certain, before we make any attempts towards it, we ought to consider whether there is a prospect of success, and the principal points to be examined are, *first*, whether we have credit enough with the party concerned to presume that he will hearken favourably to us: 2*dly*, whether we have a sufficient talent of persuading; or whether we shall not rather prejudice the cause of truth than promote it: And, 3*dly*, whether the party concerned be of a temper to bear contradiction: for, if we have sufficient grounds to judge that either we ourselves are unqualified to gain our point, or he to yield to truth, the discreetest part we can take is that of silence; because, since the principal end of charity is the good of our neighbour, the obligation of it ceases, of course, when there is no prospect to bring about that end, from whatever cause the obstacle to it may proceed.

This rule alone almost cuts off all personal disputes about

religion; for experience shews but too plainly how unsuccessful such disputes usually are.

This is many times occasioned by the incapacity of those who will needs set up for champions of the faith, when they neither have knowledge nor temper enough to manage a dispute to the advantage of their cause, and so truth is rather prejudiced than promoted by their zeal: and therefore, the best thing they can do is to wave all such disputes, and make converts by the fervour of their prayers, and example of a holy life: for when persons are unqualified for combats of this nature, their case is much the same with that of Josephus and Azarias, mentioned in the book of Machabees, who being ambitious to get a name by fighting, would needs hazard a battle with their enemies contrary to the orders they had received from Judas Machabeus, and the success proved answerable to the rashness of their undertaking, for their whole army was defeated; and the scripture gives this reason for it, *because they were not of the race of those men by whom* Israel *was to be saved.* Now every man is not made to be a defender of the faith; and they who have no talent for it, may be sure it is no part of their calling; and that God requires no more of them than the edification of a Christian life, which is the best proof they can give of the truth of the religion they profess.

But let a person be ever so capable of maintaining the truth, yet if the adverse party be hardened against it, either by natural obstinacy, interest, or prejudice of education, it is all labour lost to attempt to undeceive him: such a one is blind, because he will be so; and if you will needs force him to open his eyes by the dint of argument and reason, it will have no other effect than to make him shut them the closer, that he might not see the light which would convince him of his error. A person, under these circumstances, *hates the light*, as Christ expresses it; and the clearer it is the more it offends him: and therefore, since doing an ungrateful thing can never be a proper means to make converts, it follows, that disputes in this case can be in no manner of use, but will rather serve to make the adverse party more obstinate in his error: opposition and contradiction will put him upon his guard, and excite him to a more industrious application, to elude or baffle the reason you bring to convince him.

So that it is plain that charity cannot be the motive of entering into disputes with persons thus disposed; since there can be no charity in applying remedies, which will only inflame the distemper; and therefore, in cases like this, a modest silence is ever preferable to a noisy dispute: and if our charity be disappointed by it in its desire of propagating the truth, it finds at least its account in preserving peace, which is always a desirable good, and expressly recommended by St. Paul, who exhorts us to *have peace with all men, as far as it is possible:* nay, and by Christ himself, who styles all lovers of peace *blessed:* and assures them, that they shall be in a special manner called, *the children of God.*

FIFTY-SECOND ENTERTAINMENT.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

If it be possible, as much as is in you, having peace with all men. Rom. xii. 18.

I HAVE shewed in my last discourse, how wary we ought to be not to give offence, by an indiscreet forwardness in contradicting our neighbour: however, since an unreasonable constraint would utterly destroy the principal fruit of society, because the chief end of conversation is to communicate our thoughts to one another, which cannot be done unless men have a decent freedom allowed them to speak their mind; and since it may also be reasonably supposed that all men are not of that obstinate temper as to be fond of their errors, especially in matters of importance; it follows, that a modest contradictor may be both useful and acceptable on certain occasions, and absolutely necessary in others; namely, when there is a probability that our speaking will be profitable, and our silence prejudicial to the spiritual or temporal good of our neighbour: the only point that then remains to be examined is, what precautions are necessary, in order to prevent our giving offence in the manner of contradicting; which shall be the subject of this discourse.

Opposing men's opinions or inclinations, even in matters wherein their interest or honour is concerned, is one of those ungrateful charitable offices which must be managed with the utmost tenderness: for though necessity may

justify the doing a harsh thing, nothing can justify the doing it in a harsh way; and, in reality, it is not so much the harshness of the thing itself, as the manner of doing it, that often gives offence; because it makes men judge that our principal aim is not to do them good, but to take a pleasure in giving them pain; and whenever any one has that opinion of us, all we can say to him is received with prejudice, and lost upon him.

Hence it is, that fraternal correction, admonishing a person of his faults, or advising him contrary to his inclinations, though they be all charitable offices, and many times absolutely necessary, yet become very often fruitless; because we are not careful enough to correct the bitterness which is inseparable from those duties, but rather increase it, by mixing some of our own gall with it: and so it is in the case of contradicting men's opinions; the doing it in many cases carries bitterness with it; but the way of doing it may be so tempered with sweetness, that no reasonable person can take offence at it.

I will not, however, pretend to give rules so universal as shall suit all persons and conditions; they will arise naturally from the occasions we fall into, and the difference of circumstances must in a great measure lead us to them: for the way of treating with those that are above us, either in quality or authority, is certainly very different from that of conversing with equals or inferiors: superiors are not to be spoken to but with deference and respect: a smart or snappish way of contradicting them is both unmannerly and undutiful; and a person surprised into this fault ought to make some atonement for it upon the spot: all manner of civility is likewise due to equals, when we deliver our sentiments in opposition to theirs; and even inferiors have a title to a certain affability, which may make them, in some measure, forget the lowness of their state: so that a regard is certainly to be had to the difference of persons and conditions; and the only general rule I know of, is to study the humour and temper of those with whom we are most conversant, and accommodate ourselves to it, as the apostle did, by *becoming all to all, in order to gain all to Christ.* This, indeed, requires a great stock of virtue, without which no man can be equal and uniform in the practice of this rule, which made a modern author observe, very judiciously, *nothing is so well bred as a Christian:* because a

good Christian is charitable, meek, and humble; and almost all trespasses against good manners, which offend our neighbour, are the fruit of *pride*, *selfishness*, and a *rough unmortified temper:* so that wherever charity abounds and is joined with a meek and humble heart, there will be but little need of rules or precepts. An obliging air, and the art of pleasing in all incident occasions, will result naturally from it.

They who have their dependance at court, and seek to make their fortune that way, are perfectly versed in this art: because a discreet and well managed self-love, which is the most perfect mimic of charity, governs them in all they do. Hence it is, that nothing appears so meek, so humble, so obliging, as the behaviour of these men: they make it their business to study the humour of the prince, or favourite minister, to whom they make their court; they approach him with the greatest respect; watch the most favourable moments for it, and weigh every word they have to say, for fear of giving the least offence. Now, when *charity* abounds in Christians, as much as *self-love* does in the children of this world, it produces the very same effects in their outward behaviour: I mean the same attentions to please, and the same precautions to avoid everything, which by displeasing, may frustrate the end they aim at, of doing good to their neighbour.

Charity therefore is the best rule, and the surest guide in all the different occurrences of human life, when any ungrateful duty is to be performed; as is that, when the good of our neighbour obliges us to oppose his inclinations, or contradict his sentiments, and maintain some truth which is disagreeable to him. For whoever consults the rule of charity, will be sure, at least, to avoid in the case mentioned, such faults as are directly opposite to its principal end.

The first of these, is a certain *decisive air* in delivering our opinions. This is very ungrateful in any person whatsoever, let his capacity or character be what it will. The reason is, *first*, because this way of deciding dogmatically, carries with it an air of presumption and self-conceit, which all men hate, and no superiority of wit or condition can justify: and, *secondly*, because it betrays a secret ambition of domineering over, and captivating all men's judgments to their own; which is nothing less than invading a liberty

to which all men have a natural right, of using their own reason, and may be called a kind of tyranny in conversation.

They who are guilty of this fault, whenever their reasons will not convince, are apt to proceed to open or at least tacit reproaches; as by saying, *that what they advance is incontestible; that they are surprised how men of sense can doubt of it*, and the like: which, in effect, is nothing less than accusing a man, either of stupidity in not seeing, or wilful obstinacy in not yielding to clear reason. Now this is certainly a very improper way to bring men over to the truth; because, we may be sure, that they who are not or will not be convinced by our reasons, will never be converted by our reproaches; for reproaches add no weight to reasons, nor serve any way to set them in a clearer light; but only betray a want of temper, and an excessive stiffness in our own opinion.

Another fault to be avoided in the manner of contradicting, is the doing it with an air of contempt; as by telling a person, *that we pity his ignorance, or think it not worth our pains to undeceive him;* or expressing our disdain of him by a scornful look or gesture. This savours of arrogance, and is highly provoking; because as the love of esteem is one of the most predominant passions of human nature, and ought therefore to be managed with the greatest tenderness; so nothing wounds it more sensibly than any mark of contempt; which made St. Paul exhort all Christians to prevent one another with demonstrations of esteem and respect: *honore invicem prævenientes;* and we ought always to look upon it as a trespass against the charity we owe our neighbour to give him to understand, either by words or actions, that we have no esteem for him; because, by so doing, we shut up the most natural way by which we have access to his heart, and by rendering ourselves odious, become wholly unuseful to him.

Finally, a third fault to be avoided in the manner of contradicting, is the doing it with too much heat; because all heat and passion is not only contrary to Christian modesty, but likewise apt to provoke those of the contrary opinion to retaliate upon us with the same heat, and so turn conversation into mere noise and clamour, the usual consequence whereof is scurrilous or reflecting language; and one word drawing on another, a breach of peace and charity must follow of course.

But besides this inconvenience, which is considerable, any degree of heat in disputes is prejudicial to the cause of truth. 1*st.* Because it looks like offering violence to a man's reason, and coming upon him with an armed force; which, instead of convincing, serves rather to provoke him to a more obstinate resistance: and, 2*dly*, because whoever maintains an opinion with heat, is justly suspected to adhere to it, rather out of passion than conviction of reason; which naturally gives a prepossession against it, and takes off from the weight of the reasons for it.

Besides, passion always obscures reason more or less, and disables it from exerting itself; whereas he who possesses himself is both master of his reason in its full extent, and has words much better at command, to set forth his thoughts in the most advantageous light. Truth, in the mouth of such a person, appears in its full strength and beauty; and whether the adverse party yields to it or not, he has at least the comfort of being conscious to himself that he has acted both like a good Christian, and a man of good sense.

These therefore are the principal faults to be avoided in the manner of contradicting, and in all other cases when charity obliges us to speak any ungrateful truth; care must be taken in all such occurrences, to season our discourse so with obliging expressions, and an air of modesty, that the party to whom we speak may be convinced, that nothing but our concern for his good could have induced us to undertake so disagreeable a task, that we even offer violence to our nature, and suffer much more pain than we can possibly give him in the doing of it.

Some, perhaps, will be apt to think that civility and good manners, in this as well as other cases, are but the ornamental part of human life, but no part of Christian duty. But this is a great mistake; for civility is not only of itself a moral virtue, but every branch of it has its root in some principle of the gospel. Is not all morality, as it regards our neighbour, epitomized in the short precept of *bearing* and *forbearing?* And how would Christians abound in good manners, if they but made this precept the rule and standard of their behaviour? How happy would all societies be, in which each member performed this part towards the maintaining of the common peace? For, by virtue of this rule alone, we should neither wilfully give offence, nor easily

take offence, at least at the ordinary slips of inadvertency or surprise. All arrogance, contentiousness, ill-humour, or caprice, would be utterly banished out of Christian assemblies, and we may confidently say, that whoever has that constant guard upon himself, as to be careful neither to *give* nor *take offence*, has a just title to the character of what we call a well bred man. But since it is morally impossible a person should be always equal and uniform in this practice, without the help of the Christian virtues of *humility*, *meekness*, and particularly the virtue of *charity*, it follows, that civility is grounded upon the very maxims of the gospel, and that christianity is the only solid and lasting foundation of it.

But to shew that even the most ordinary duties of civility, I mean such as are established by mere custom, have also their foundation in the law of God, I shall conclude with translating the excellent thoughts of a French author upon this subject. "God, says he, has been pleased to order the world so, that men should be united together in society by a mutual dependence upon one another: so that the one being not able to live in any comfortable manner without the other's help, this bond of mutual society should not only be useful, but absolutely necessary. Whence it follows, that whatever conduces to keep up this society comes within the order of this providential disposition, and is in some measure commanded by God, in virtue of the law of nature, which obliges each part to contribute to the good of the whole.

"Now this society cannot possibly subsist but by a reciprocal love and esteem of the members whereof it is composed: for hatred or contempt breaks the ties that hold it together, and are infallible causes of division; because mankind being a body composed of persons who naturally love and esteem themselves, and by consequence covet to be loved and esteemed by others; if they should mutually neglect this way of rendering themselves agreeable and useful, the whole world would be no better than a jarring multitude of mal-contents, dissatisfied with one another, and weary of their own condition. Besides, there being innumerable little things, which cannot be stipulated for by way of bargain, and are only to be purchased for love, and yet contribute very much towards the convenience and comfort of life, it follows, that there can

be no other lasting bond of society than that of natural love and esteem.

But since these qualities are lodged in the heart, and are therefore imperceptible to sense, unless they manifest themselves by some outward effects, hence it is that men, by a kind of universal tacit agreement, have introduced certain outward forms of civility, as visits, mutual salutations, compliments of congratulation or condolence, and the like, which should serve as visible tokens of their inward respect and love for each other; the consequence whereof is, that to be wanting to those duties is looked upon as a mark of indifference or disesteem: so that all those who have a claim to our esteem or love, have the same title to the outward civilities, which custom has established as tokens of them; and the omission of them renders us guilty of injustice, by shewing a disposition contrary to what we really owe them: we are therefore bound to be punctual in all such duties; and the motive of this exactness is not only conformable to reason, but commanded by God."

These are the sentiments of this author; and they are truly christian and noble. For they teach us the art of pleasing men, and gaining their esteem and love; not upon mean principles of interest or vanity, but upon a higher consideration of pleasing and obeying God: they instruct us in the method of a sort of Christian thrift and management, by making the best of such occurrences, as we almost daily meet with: they show us how to give a value to the most indifferent actions, which we usually throw away: finally, we learn from them the true secret of living peaceably with all men, and in all places and families where God's providence has appointed us a station; which it is impossible to do if we frequently shock men by our words or actions, or neglect to pay them the civilities they justly expect from us; for this gives occasion to discontents, murmurs and reproaches; causes at first indifference and coldness, and soon after hatred and aversion.

But, if this care of cultivating and preserving peace with all Christians in general be necessary, it is of much greater consequence in reference to persons united together by some particular tie; and of the greatest imaginable to married persons. These ought to be as much afraid to give offence as to give poison to one another: their study ought to be to please mutually, by all the endearments and reci-

procal compliances that are within the law of God: for if either of the parties make a slight matter of shocking the other by an ill humour, capriciousness, or thwarting temper, it will unavoidably create an uneasiness: This uneasiness will soon change the most tender affection into coldness and indifference, and it is particularly in the conjugal state, that coldness and indifference are but one remove from hatred and aversion; and no hatred is more irreconcileable than that of married persons. *First*, because the hated object is daily present: and *secondly*, because it is always grounded upon a resentment of a real or supposed ingratitude, which is the hardest to be forgiven.

These therefore are principally concerned in all that has been said of *disputes*, speaking *ungrateful truths*, *contradiction*, and the usual faults committed in the manner of it. Their obligation of avoiding all such faults, is considerably enforced by the circumstance of their state, which cannot but be unhappy without mutual love and esteem; and it is morally impossible this love and esteem should be preserved amidst frequent jars, disputes and contradictions, though they be but for trifling things. Nay, the smaller the thing is about which the dispute arises, the greater is the indiscretion, because the mischief it occasions is easier to be avoided. The cause may be a trifle, when the effects and consequences of it are far from being so; since nothing happens more frequently, than that amidst warm disputes about things of no moment, the parties insensibly conceive an aversion towards each other, and part with the highest dissatisfaction on both sides: and when this happens to be the case of married persons, there is an end of peace and happiness in that family.

I shall end with St. Paul's exhortation; *have peace with all men, if it be possible.* Be not lovers of contention and strife, but be lovers of peace; and the blessings promised to the peaceful will attend you, both in this life and in the life to come.

FIFTY-THIRD ENTERTAINMENT.

OF DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Luke i. 28.

These sacred words, wherewith the blessed Virgin was saluted by the angel Gabriel, contain the principal grounds

of that devotion which the Church has always paid her: for though we pay a proportionable degree of honour to all God's saints, and implore the assistance of their prayers, yet the Mother of God is justly honoured with peculiar marks of distinction; and the great number of solemn days set apart to perpetuate the memory of favours bestowed upon her by Almighty God, are a convincing proof that the Church is under more than an ordinary solicitude to encourage and promote the devotion of the faithful to her: nor can it be doubted, but that they who perform this devotion, according to the true spirit and intention of the Church, will reap the fruit of it in a continual improvement in solid virtue. The subject then of this discourse shall be to set forth the principal grounds of this devotion; that is, the proper motives to encourage us to it.

To prevent all mistakes relating to this matter, we must lay down as an undoubted maxim of faith, that whatever excellencies we attribute to the Blessed Virgin, or whatever terms we make use of to express the esteem and respect we have for her, we must regard her no otherwise than a *pure creature;* and by consequence, infinitely below God, depending on him, and indebted to him for all the gifts of nature and grace she possessed in this life, and the eminent degree of glory to which she is exalted in Heaven. So that our devotion to the Blessed Virgin, like that to other saints, is a *relative honour*, redounding effectually upon, and terminating wholly in God. In honouring her, we honour God much more; and praising and admiring her eminent virtues, we only proclaim the infinite power and bounties of her divine maker, who could enrich a pure creature with such excellent gifts.

And in this we conform ourselves exactly to the humble sentiments she had of herself, and verify literally her prophecy, delivered in these words: *For behold all generations shall call me Blessed; because he who is powerful has done great things to me:* By which words the honour and devotion which the Catholic Church has paid her throughout all ages, down to this time, and will continue to pay her to the end of the world, is precisely marked out to us. But she says not, that this honour shall be paid her for any thing she has of herself, but *because he who is powerful has done great things to her:* That is, has bestowed upon her gifts and blessings surpassing all human power. Which

part of the prophecy would not be fulfilled, if the Church in honouring the Blessed Virgin meant anything else but to honour God's blessing in her. Whoever goes beyond this, or pretends to raise her above the rank of a *pure creature*, and set her upon the level with her Son, is guilty of impiety and blasphemy; and falls into the heresy of the Collyridions, a mad set of bigotted women of Thrace; who are reckoned amongst the number of ancient heretics by St. Epiphanius, for worshipping the Blessed Virgin as a kind of goddess, and assuming to themselves the priestly character in *offering sacrifice* to her: for this, I say, they are condemned by St. Epiphanius as guilty of an impious, extravagant, and sacrilegious devotion, and not barely for invoking the Blessed Virgin, as will appear manifest to any man that will but give himself the trouble to read St. Epiphanius upon this subject. *L.* 3. *tom.* 3. *Hæresi*, 78, 79.

This therefore is the doctrine of the Catholic Church, viz. that the Blessed Virgin is a *pure creature;* that she is to be honoured no otherwise than as such; or, as St. Epiphanius expresses it, *non ultra modum et decorum*, not beyond the bounds of *moderation* and *decency*. Finally, that it is a sacrilege and idolatry to offer sacrifice to her, or pay her that worship which is due to God alone. But though she be a pure creature, we may safely say, she is the most excellent that ever was created: and this suffices abundantly to justify the titles and honours decreed her by the Church, and all those pompous eulogiums of her, transmitted to us in the writings of the holy fathers. I should run out into an excessive length, if I should transcribe any considerable part of them: I will therefore content myself with one out of St. John Chrysostom, delivered in these words:

"The Ever-Blessed Virgin Mary, says he, is surely a "great miracle: for, what has ever been or ever will be "greater or more excellent than she? She alone surpasses "in greatness both heaven and earth: what was ever more "pure and holy? Neither *prophets*, nor *martyrs*, nor "*patriarchs*, nor *angels*, nor *thrones*, nor *powers*, nor "*seraphim*, nor any thing amongst creatures, whether "visible or invisible, can be found greater or more excel-"lent than she is: she is both hand-maid and mother of "God; both mother and virgin. She is mother of him "who was begotten of the Father before all beginning;

" whom angels and men own to be the Lord of all things. " Do you desire to know how far the Virgin Mary surpasses " the heavenly powers? They stand before the throne " with fear and trembling, covering their faces; but she " presents mankind to him whom she brought forth; and " it is through her we obtain the pardon of our sins."

This is St. Chrysostom's eulogium of the Blessed Virgin, which he concludes with this prayer to her:

" Wherefore, hail, *virgin* and *mother; honour, glory* and " *pillar* of the Church; pray continually for us to Jesus " Christ, your Son and our Lord; that through thee we may " find mercy in the day of judgment, and obtain those " blessings which are laid up for those who love God, by " the grace and bounty of Jesus Christ our Lord."

Here we see this great saint and champion of the Catholic faith, *first*, makes the panegyric of the Blessed Virgin, in such lofty terms, that if any one should do the same now, he would perhaps have been accused of having over-strained his matter; and, *secondly*, moved with the consideration of her superior excellencies above all other creatures, and excited thereby to a confidence in her holy intercession, he humbly begs of her to pray for him to her only Son, *that he may obtain blessings laid up for those who love God.*

Whence it follows, that as praying to the Blessed Virgin was the devotion and practice of the Church in his time; so, by his saying *that it is through her we obtain the pardon of our sins;* and again, *that through her we may find mercy in the day of judgment;* he only means through her *intercessions*, to which her eminent holiness and merits give doubtless a great efficacy and weight; for it has always been the undoubted faith of the Church, 1*st*, That Jesus Christ is the only *mediator* of *redemption;* 2*dly*, That he alone has *immediate access* to God, without the mediation of any other; and that by consequence, the prayers of *saints* and *angels* in Heaven, as well as of the faithful upon earth, are all offered up through the mediation of Jesus Christ; and 3*dly*, That there is no salvation but through him, according to that solemn declaration of St. Peter, before the priests and princes of the Jews, (Acts iv.) *There is no salvation in any other, nor is there any other name under Heaven given to men, in which they can be saved:* so that the Blessed Virgin, in her now glorious state in Heaven, has no other part in the salvation of men but

that of *begging* and *interceding* for them. Christ alone is the *propitiation of our sins;* he alone is our *mediator* of *reconciliation* or *redemption;* because he alone has paid our ransom. The Blessed Virgin aspires to no such honour; but being placed before the throne, at the head of all the saints and angels, presents our petitions to God, and joins her prayers with ours, to render them acceptable to him: this is the part she now acts in the salvation of men; this is the ground of our trust and confidence in her; and we shall find our hopes built upon a very solid foundation, if we but consider the extraordinary favours bestowed upon her by Almighty God in this life, and the eminent rank she now holds in Heaven.

The *first* extraordinary grace then bestowed upon her was, her being elected from all eternity to be the *mother of God;* a dignity of so high a rank, that nothing in this world ever approached near it; for by virtue of this election she was chosen to be, next after Christ, the principal interest of man's redemption: by virtue of the same she was chosen to be, by the nearest relation a pure creature is capable of, the immaculate spouse of God the Father, viz. in becoming truly mother of him in time who was begotten of the Father from all eternity: hence also this great title of *Queen of Heaven,* wherewith the Church salutes her, became due to her; and by this title we may conceive her as much above the angels and saints, as a queen is above her subjects upon earth: but since the rank allotted to each one in Heaven is answerable to the degree he has of purity and holiness, because glory is the reward of virtue and merit; it follows, that as the Blessed Virgin was predestinated from all eternity to be the *Mother of God,* and *Queen of Heaven,* so God took care to fit her for that eminent dignity, by enriching her soul with the most exquisite treasures of grace and virtues, that ever were bestowed on any pure creature.

Hence flows the *second* extraordinary favour bestowed upon her, viz. her being sanctified in her mother's womb, in the very moment of her conception: for which reason, she is the only saint whose *conception,* as well as *nativity,* is solemnized in the Church by a particular feast; because holy-days are only instituted in honour of persons who died in the state of grace, at the time to which those feasts have a relation.

Whence also flows a *third* extraordinary favour, viz. her having been preserved, throughout the whole course of her life, from all spot or stain of *actual sin*. Her *reason* was never obscured by any passion ; but being always subject to God, her *will* was likewise perfectly subject to her reason : she no sooner knew her divine creator by *faith*, but her will, inflamed with *charity*, broke forth into acts of praise and adoration of him : we may truly say, her heart took fire in an instant; because God's grace found no resistance in it: and as God's grace increased in her soul without intermission, because she never ceased to cooperate with it ; so all virtues, and principally a most ardent love of God, received proportionably their gradual improvement, and went on increasing, during the whole course of her life: her purity, both of mind and body, was perfectly angelical : her conformity to the will of God, and obedience to all his holy inspirations, was equal to the love she had for him ; and her charity for her neighbour, being kindled and continually nourished by the same fire of divine love, was inferior only to that which no creature can attain to, and can be attributed to God alone. So that we may truly say, that though all mankind be created to the image and likeness of God, the soul of the Blessed Virgin, next to the sacred humility of Christ, had the most perfect resemblance of him, and came up nearest to the divine original, though still infinitely inferior to it.

But though all these virtues were possessed by her in so eminent a degree, it was her admirable *humility* that gave them their greatest beauty and lustre : this was properly her favourite and distinguishing virtue, which raised her above all others, and rendered her so highly acceptable to God : this was the basis and foundation of all her greatness ; for she was truly great in the eyes of God, because she appeared as nothing in her own ; that large profusion of the divine bounties on her never surprised her into the least thought of vanity ; because the higher she was exalted by God, the lower she sunk down into the consideration of her own nothingness ; never assuming to herself the least part of the glory that was due to God alone, but returning it all back to its proper source ; so that her humility was not only the nurse and guardian of all her other virtues, but a perpetual source of gratitude, adoration, praise, and thanksgiving to her bountiful benefactor.

It was thus the Blessed Virgin was prepared and fitted by the hands of God himself for the high dignity of being the mother of the Redeemer of the world; and here she received a *fourth* extraordinary and singular grace, I mean, her being overshadowed by the power and virtue of the Holy Ghost, and so remaining a pure virgin, at the same time that she became the true and natural mother of God: by virtue of which grace or privilege, she was also exempted from the curse laid upon Eve, and her whole sex, of bringing forth in pain; for as she conceived by the pure virtue of the divine spirit, so she brought forth without the least violation of her virginal integrity; though her humility was such, that she chose to pass her whole life-time for no other than an ordinary married woman; and therefore, to leave the world in this mean opinion of her, she paid an exact obedience to the law of Moses, by submitting herself to the ceremony of being purified; which, in the eyes of the world, supposes her having been defiled. But what is most stupendous, and surpasses all the examples of humility that ever have been practised by any pure creature, rather than reveal a secret, the discovery whereof would have been so glorious to her, she suffered her virtue to be suspected by the person, the dearest to her upon earth, until God himself vindicated her innocence, by revealing to St. Joseph the whole mystery of the Incarnation, and the part his blessed spouse had in it.

I pass over the rest of her life, whereof thirty years were spent in the blessed company of Jesus; and all passed in an uninterrupted practice of the sublimest virtue, and a continual encrease of grace and merits; until God was pleased to crown them with the last singular favour, I mean, that of her glorious assumption into Heaven; where she is now seated, as I may say, nearest to the person of her dear Son; honoured by angels and saints as their queen; and cherished by God, answerably to the love she bore him, and the faithful obedience she paid him during the whole course of her life: so that her prerogative of glory is now as singular as were those of grace before her dissolution.

Now, is there not here encouragement enough to pay a particular devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and repose an entire trust and confidence in her intercession? Has she not all the conditions requisite to qualify her for the office of an intercessor? Does she want either *will* to ask, or *power*

to obtain for us of Almighty God whatever helps we stand in need of? To doubt of her will, is to question her *charity;* which being a virtue, that not only remains, but is improved and perfected in Heaven, we cannot doubt but her zeal for the good of souls is far greater now than when she was on earth: her soul burnt then with charity for her neighbour, because she loved God with her whole heart; and since, that love is more ardent now she sees God face to face; it follows that her charity for mankind, and zeal for the salvation of souls, is now also proportionably greater: and therefore the Church styles her the *mother of mercy*, not only because he, who is essentially *goodness* and *mercy*, is the sacred fruit of her womb; but also because she has the tenderness and merciful bowels of a mother for us. She regards us all as her children, because by the grace of baptism, we are the *adoptive sons of* God, and *brothers* of Jesus Christ. She loves the just, because they are conformable to the image of her son; and she compassionates sinners, because they are redeemed with his sacred blood: so that all may find a merciful mother in her, and one ready to interest herself in their behalf, and present their petitions to the giver of all good gifts.

Therefore, we cannot question her good will to perform this charitable office for us; much less can we doubt of her power. Her charity alone secures us of her readiness to intercede for us; but all her virtues, by which she was so eminently acceptable to God, plead for the efficacy of her intercession. For if St. James exhorts us to pray for one another, because (says he) *the continual prayer of a just man availeth much*, (chap. v. 16.) and that even in this life, whilst we are yet subject to many failings, how powerful then and efficacious in our behalf, must be the intercession of a person who never offended God by the least thought, word, or deed, during the whole course of her life, and is now in the highest degree of faith in the court of Heaven? Nay, may we not justly look upon all those singular and extraordinary graces which God bestowed upon her in this life, as so many assured pledges, that he will refuse her nothing, now she is triumphant with him in glory; where those virtues, which deserved so high a degree of favour upon earth, have now received their full accomplishment and perfection; and, by consequence, have rendered her still more acceptable to him?

Suppose that in the moment of her triumphant entry into glory, (which after the ascension of Christ was the most solemn feast that ever was celebrated in the court of Heaven,) suppose, I say, that in that moment she had asked grace for any sinner, can we think that God would have denied her request! And, has she not the same interest and power now as she had then? Is she not in the same degree of favour, and will she be not so for all eternity?—For we must not fancy as if favour had its vicissitudes in Heaven as in this world. All things are fixed and permanent in the state of bliss. Rewards and honours are distributed there, according to every one's holiness and merit: and, therefore, as the Blessed Virgin will always surpass all saints in holiness, so will she be always most acceptable to God, and have the greatest power with him. He will always honour her as *Queen of Heaven*, and Jesus Christ will always regard her as his mother, and of all creatures dearest to him. For which reason he has inspired the Church to pay her extraordinary honours, and consecrate several festival days in memory of her; because, he will have his favours pass, as it were, through her hands; and render us sensible that our petitions will never be more effectual than when we prevail with her to undertake the presenting of them to Almighty God, through the mediation of her dear Son. So that the true and only reason of our addressing ourselves so often to her is, because we have a greater confidence in her prayers than our own; and in so doing, we do but justice both to her and ourselves. For we are miserable sinners, and she is a most glorious saint: we are defiled with many crimes, and she is without spot or stain: we have deserved God's wrath, by so many repeated infidelities towards him, and she has ever been his faithful servant, and never offended him by the least venial sin: and is it not then just we should hope for a more favourable acceptance of prayers, presented by the holy and unspotted hands of the immaculate mother of God, than when we ourselves present them to Almighty God?

We read in the holy scripture, that God commanded Job's friends to go to him, and desire him to pray for them; because God was angry with them, and would not have regarded their prayers, unless Job had interceded for them. And ought we not then also, who in all likelihood

are upon no better terms with Almighty God, than Job's friends were; ought we not, I say, to endeavour to make an interest with some powerful intercessor, some select friend of God, such as the Blessed Virgin is, to pray for us, lest our prayers should be unacceptable to him? This certainly is not only the most pious and most humble, but the most effectual course that we can take. For if, by a sincere devotion, and assiduous application to her, we can but render her our patroness and advocate to her Son, there is nothing we may not hope for from his mercy. We cannot put our eternal interest into better hands than by engaging her to favour our cause, who has the greatest power with him; from whom alone we must expect the relief of all our necessities in this life, and a share in his eternal joys hereafter.

FIFTY-FOURTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED, AND SOME DIRECTIONS RELATING TO IT.

Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Luke i. 28.

THERE is no devotion so solid and well-grounded but may be rendered fruitless by our own fault. It will not therefore be improper to give some directions relating to the devotion I have spoken of, which shall be the subject of this discourse.

I have sometimes read in books, and heard in sermons, that the true and solid devotion to the Blessed Virgin consists in the imitation of her virtues. I must own, indeed, this is the most perfect, but I cannot think it to be the only devotion to her: for if it be the only true one, they who are not yet imitators of her virtues are utterly excluded from having any part in the practice of this devotion; and yet these are the persons who stand most in need of being exhorted and encouraged to it: because, as they are farther out of the way of salvation, they stand more in need of a special grace to bring them into it; and, by consequence of some powerful advocate near the throne of grace, to plead their cause, and intercede for them.

It is certainly for this reason that the Blessed Virgin, in the litanies composed in honour of her, is styled *The refuge of sinners:* and how will this title be verified of her, if the

just alone be allowed to be of the number of her votaries? How will sinners find a refuge in her, if they are not encouraged to fly to her for sanctuary, and put themselves under her protection? It is true they are not yet imitators of her virtues; but must they despair of ever being so?—Must they not desire, and endeavour to become, what as yet they are not? Now it is by a constant devotion to her, and daily imploring the assistance of her prayers, they must hope to be at last admitted into the happy number. For which reason, instead of asserting that our devotion to the Blessed Virgin is to consist in the imitation of her virtues; it seems to me more proper to say, that the imitation of her virtues is the mark we ought to set before us, and the end we ought to aim at in our whole practice of devotion to her: and therefore we must make a large difference between two sorts of sinners. The *first* is, of those who not only are sinners, but seem resolved to continue so; at least use no serious endeavours, nor discover any desire to be delivered from their sinful state. The *second* is, of those who are sinners indeed, and as yet subject to many relapses; yet are very sensible of their unhappy condition, and desire sincerely to come out of it.

Now, as to the *first*, I have but little encouragement to give them, notwithstanding any pretended devotion to the Blessed Virgin, until there appears a sincere desire to correct their lives, and some serious efforts, at least, towards the putting it into execution. For, if there be any so far misled as to imagine they shall be saved by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, without quitting their habits of sin, so they be but constant to certain forms of devotion to her; I must assure them their devotion is no better than a cheat, and will avail them just as much as to say, *Lord, Lord!* without ever intending to keep his commandments.

It is true, the Blessed Virgin is the *refuge of sinners*, but not the encourager of sin. She is a sanctuary for those who, with contrite and humble hearts, fly from God's justice to his mercy; but she pretends not to receive under her protection professed and incorrigible rebels.

Finally, she refuses not to be the advocate of those who, terrified with the number and enormity of their sins, implore her intercession; provided they dispose themselves to deserve this favour, by aiming at a serious change of life, to which end all their prayers and devotions to her

must be directed: and since this appears to be the disposition of the second sort of sinners mentioned by me, I cannot say enough to encourage them to continue their devotions to her, and hope well of the success: for, whatever their sins may be, since they have a sincere desire and intention to quit them, this disposition cannot but come from God; and a constant practice of such devotions as are approved of, and recommended by the Church, cannot but be a powerful means to improve it by degrees, and bring it at last to the perfection they aim at; which they must always keep in view, that they be always advancing towards it: so that although they begin their devotions to the Blessed Virgin, in a state very unconformable to her holiness and purity, they may hope, by the continuance of them, to be transformed into new creatures, and in the end become conformable to her, in the imitation of her virtues.

This, therefore, is the great rule of all sorts of devotion, whether to the Blessed Virgin, or any other saint, viz. whatever devotion is conducive to the amendment of our lives, and directed to that end, cannot but be solid, and acceptable to God. But if, on the contrary, any devotion be, through abuse, made an encouragement to continue in sin, it ought to be regarded as a delusion, or stratagem of the devil: and, therefore, if there be any (as I can scarce think there are) who promise salvation to Christians for the bare practice of certain external forms of devotion, though they should run on in their habits of sin to their very last sickness, this is not the doctrine of the Church, but detested by her; which therefore ought not to hinder the faithful from practising any form of devotion not disapproved by the Church, because they may profit by what is really good in it, if they be punctual in performing all the rules of it, and depend no farther upon it than as it is a means to obtain God's grace to resist sin, and advance in virtue: for it is most certain, that as far as any devotion contributes to this end, and has an influence upon the leading a good life, so far it is to be recommended; and just so far, and no farther, a hope of salvation may be built upon the practice of it.

I will now speak briefly of the devotions against which no exception can be made. The *first* is, never to begin or end the day without putting ourselves under the protection

of the Blessed Virgin, by saying some short prayer in honour of her; for we must all regard her as our mother in Jesus Christ: and therefore, as children ask blessing of their parents regularly twice a day, so we must make it our constant practice not to let the morning or evening pass without having first obtained a blessing of her. The angelical salutation, the office and litanies composed in honour of her, are to be preferred before all other vocal devotions, as being of the greatest authority, and recommended by the universal practice of the Church.

The *second* is, a devout observance of the feasts ordained in honour of her. These are solemn days in the Church, and to be kept with a devotion answerable to the intention of their institution. All those then that have a zeal for her honour, and aspire to be in the number of her true servants, must be eager to testify it on those days, and distinguish themselves by a more than ordinary piety; and particularly by worthily frequenting the holy sacrament. For as those who seek to insinuate themselves into the favour of any prince, besides their making their daily court, take care to appear before him on certain solemn days in rich new clothes; so if we will gain the favour of the Queen of Heaven, besides our daily devotions, we must not fail to make our court on her festival days, by giving the same marks, in a spiritual manner, of our zeal and respect for her; our old clothes therefore, that is our old habits of sin, will suit very ill with the solemnity of those days: *The old man must be put off with his acts, and the new man put on; who is created according to God, in justice and holiness:* that so we may appear at the public service of the Church, *renewed in the spirit of the mind,* as St. Paul speaks; that is, adorned in the soul with sanctifying grace: and so her feasts will both be kept holy by us, and we ourselves shall be made holy by keeping them.

The third and last devotion I shall speak of is, that of the *rosary,* or *beads;* which, whether we consider the prayers whereof it is composed, or the method observed in saying of them, will appear not only profitable, but admirable in its institution: since by means of it, if performed methodically, and with attention, the mind is weekly carried through all the principal mysteries of man's redemption, and has an opportunity of making as often an acknowledgment to Christ, for all he has done and suffered for us:

but there is also this peculiar advantage in it, that it is a devotion suited to all capacities and states; for a traveller may perform it on the road, a labourer at his work, a tradesman in his shop, a gentleman in his walks of pleasure, and a sick man confined to his bed; and even the most ignorant are as fully qualified for the performance of it as the most learned divine.

If it be objected, that repeating the same prayer so often over is tedious, and apt to cause coldness and distraction in the mind, which stands in need of variety, to keep it awake and attentive: I answer, that the coldness or distraction occasioned by repeating the same prayer often over, is either voluntarily or involuntary; if voluntary, then it is our own fault; and we have it in our power to correct it: if involuntary, then there is no fault at all, nor harm done; for our prayers will nevertheless have their full effect: However, it is much to be feared, that this coldness, distraction, and tediousness, in repeating the same prayer often over, proceeds mostly from our not being sufficiently sensible of our necessities and wants. Do we not see beggars in the streets, repeating the same request to all that pass by, over and over again, from morning till night?—For they study no variety, and yet this repetition of the same form of words hinders not, but that they are very intent upon the business they are about; because, being heartily sensible of their necessitous condition, they are never weary of desiring and asking a relief; in the same manner, therefore, if we had as deep a sense of the necessities of our souls, and as eager a desire to receive a constant relief from Heaven as beggars have to receive an alms, we should have no difficulty to ask it fifty times over, with the same attention as once; nor ever grow weary of soliciting, though in the same form of words, to obtain that which we never cease to want.

But they who are enemies to the beads tell us, that in saying them we pray ten times more to the Blessed Virgin than to Almighty God; but this is a gross mistake, as I will demonstrate by a clear example.

If I should put a request into the hands of any person, and desire him to present it for me to the king; I ask, whether my chief request be to him whom I employ to present it, or to the king to whom it is to be delivered? The question answers itself. In like manner, therefore, when we pray

thus, *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us now, and in the hour of our death,* and repeat this ten times over, it is plain that all we beg of the Blessed Virgin is, to present our requests to Almighty God; so that although we address ourselves immediately to her, our prayers are not only chiefly to God, but, to speak properly, to God alone; as the request I have spoken of is made to the king alone, though another be desired to deliver it to him; and, in effect, we pray no otherwise to the Blessed Virgin than we pray to one another, when we recommend ourselves to one another's prayers.

It is true, we call it *praying to the Blessed Virgin,* and *praying to the Saints,* when we implore the assistance of their prayers; because custom, which is wholly arbitrary, has made it the common way of speaking to call it so: and if it were the custom to call it *praying to one another,* when we desire one another's prayer, the expression would be full as proper, and yet the thing would be the same as it is now; so that call it what you please, either *praying to the Blessed Virgin,* or *praying the Blessed Virgin,* the meaning is no other than that we desire her to pray with us, and for us; to join her prayers with ours; to be a fellow-petitioner with us; and, in a word, to present our petitions to God, to render them more acceptable to him.

Which also fully answers the common frivolous objection, viz. that *we are all commanded to come to Christ:* for if this text forbids our desiring the Blessed Virgin to pray for us, it likewise forbids our desiring one another's prayers; which is absurd. I answer, therefore, that by desiring the Blessed Virgin to pray with us and for us to Christ, we not only come to him ourselves, but we also engage his Blessed Mother to come with us; since it is plain whatever form of words we use to implore her intercession, it is plain, I say, that all our heart's desires are directed to God, that our confidence of obtaining grace and salvation is wholly in God, that all our expectation is from God, through Jesus Christ; finally, that we desire no more of the Blessed Virgin than we daily desire of one another, viz. the assistance of her prayers.

Now suppose we do this fifty times a day, by repeating so often the angelical salutation, (which we call, saying a pair of beads,) suppose, I say, we do this fifty times a day, or oftener, is it not so much the better? For since to de-

sire the prayers of others is a mark of humility, and a tacit acknowledgment that we have a greater opinion of their virtue than of our own, it is still a mark of greater humility to repeat this request often, and therefore if it be good to say once, *Holy Mary, pray for us,* there can be no exception made against the frequent repetition of it. This I am sure of, that to deny the lawfulness of desiring a share in the Blessed Virgin's prayers, and at the same time to allow the lawfulness of desiring sinners upon earth to pray for us, is a manifest contradiction to common sense.

We are therefore bound to bless God, for not having been brought up in an error, which would deprive us of the benefit of having so glorious a saint in Heaven to intercede for us. For whether we consider the eminent graces which God has so liberally bestowed upon her, or the exact fidelity with which she corresponded to all his graces, we cannot but regard her as a person so acceptable to God, that he will refuse her nothing she shall ask of him for the good of our souls. Then again, when we consider that she has carried him, who is *goodness* and *mercy* itself, for nine months together in her womb ; and that she always carried him in her heart, as the sole object of her love, we cannot but conclude that she herself has received, in all that time, so ample a portion of those virtues, that it is to do her the greatest injustice not to regard her as a most merciful and tender mother, to all those who stand in need of, and cry out to her for assistance.

These then are the grounds upon which our devotion to the Blessed Virgin is built, these the reasons why we so often importune her to pray for us. If they who blame us for it, either think her not charitable enough to interest herself in our behalf, or not powerful enough to obtain anything for us, or perhaps think themselves to have as good an interest with Christ as his Blessed Mother; let us, at least, be far from entertaining either so mean an opinion of her, or so proud a one of ourselves ; let us acknowledge her to be the *Mother of Mercy,* and of all creatures the most acceptable to God ; let us also own the unworthiness of our own prayers : and therefore since, on the one hand, we have no hopes of salvation but from the pure goodness of God, through the mediation of Jesus Christ, and are sensible, on the other, that by the multitude and grievousness of our sins we have deserved to be rejected by him, let us never

cease to importune the *blessed Mother of God* to intercede for us, that we may find mercy at his hands; nor ever pass a day without offering to her, from time to time, this short but excellent prayer, *Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us, sinners, now and in the hour of our death.* Amen.

FIFTY-FIFTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE PARABLE OF THE SEED.

The sower went out to sow his seed. Luke viii. 5.

THE parable I am going to explain is thus proposed by Christ: *The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell by the* way side; *and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it: and other some fell upon a* rock; *and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it had no moisture: and other some fell among* thorns; *and the thorns growing up with it, and choked it. And other some fell upon* good ground, *and being sprung up, and yielded fruit a hundred-fold.*

This is the parable; and the principal drift of it is to mark out three several causes, by which the *seed* of the *word of God,* as Christ himself expresses it, is rendered fruitless; that is, three several obstacles to salvation, represented under the figure of the seed's falling *by the way side,* upon a *rock,* and amongst *thorns.* The *first* is thus set forth by Christ; *Some of the seed fell by the way side, and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it:* which he explains thus: *They who were by the way side, are those who hear the word; then comes the devil, and takes it out of their hearts, lest believing they should be saved.*

Here we have the character of *obdurate sinners,* and the power the devil has over them, set forth in lively colours: Christ compares them to that ground which lies near the high-way, and is usually trod hard into a path, by the number of passengers that walk upon it: now whatever seed falls upon this ground is certainly lost; *first,* because by reason of its hardness it cannot so much as enter into the earth, much less be covered deep enough to take root; and, *secondly,* because it is either trodden upon, or eaten up by the *fowls of the air:* in the same manner the seed of the divine word is lost upon the hearts of *obdurate sinners:* it falls indeed upon them; for *they hear the word,* as Christ

says, and this renders them inexcusable before God, because hearing it they give no attention to it, but are of the number of those who say to God in their hearts, *We will not have the knowledge of thy ways:* however, the *Father of mercies* ceases not to speak to them by his holy inspirations, and they have reflection enough to perceive them, and know them to be the voice of God that calls upon them: but they refuse to entertain them; they will not let them enter their hearts, for fear they should fasten upon them, and disturb them in their criminal pleasures.

This is their unhappy disposition; and though it be, of its own nature, obstacle enough to the grace that speaks interiorly to them, yet Christ attributes it chiefly to the power the devil has over them, who is watchful to nourish this disposition, and harden them in it: *they hear the word,* says Christ; *then comes the devil, and takes it out of their hearts:* he is jealous of his prey, and will not trust them wholly to themselves; but keeps assidiously about them, to hinder the seed of God's word from working any good effect upon their souls; and therefore, as soon as any good thought or truth relating to their eternal interest presents itself to their minds, the devil is ready to snatch it immediately from their hearts; *lest, believing, they should be saved,* or lest by ruminating upon it, and giving it time to make an impression, they should think seriously of a change, and break loose from the chains that keep them in bondage.

But since it is to be hoped there are not many in this abandoned and reprobate state, the whole subject of this Entertainment shall be some directions, relating to the two other obstacles to salvation, which are far more common, marked out in the parable.

The *second* hindrance to salvation, or cause which renders the *seed* of *God's word* fruitless, is thus characterised by Christ, *And some fell upon a rock; and growing up, it withered, because it wanted moisture.* By the word *rock* is understood a *rocky* or *stony ground;* for if seed were sown upon a *bare rock,* it would lie naked upon the surface of it, and it were impossible it should *grow up* at all: and therefore St. Matthew, chap. xiii. ver. 5. delivers this part of the same parable in these terms. *Some part of the seed fell upon stony ground, where it had not much earth; and forthwith it sprung up immediately, because it had no deepness of earth.* For seed which is but thinly covered with

earth shoots up much sooner than that which falls deep into the earth: but as it has a quicker growth, so it also dies sooner; because it has not moisture enough to nourish the green corn, which is soon dried up with the heat of the sun.

This is the second part of the parable; and our Saviour explains it in the following manner, *They who are sown upon a rock are those who, when they have heard the word, received it with joy; and these have no root; they believe for a time, and go back in time of temptation.* You see here a manifest difference between this character and the former: for those of the former character only *hear the word*, but *receive it not;* because they are *hard*, and *the devil comes and takes it immediately out of their hearts:* but these not only *hear the word*, but *receive* it; nay, *receive it with joy:* it makes an impression upon them; they lament their sins many times with tears, as St. Gregory observes: but what is the fruit of it? Alas, *they have no root:* it shoots up immediately, and withers soon after, producing nothing but barren desires, and purposes without effect: all their fervour is no more than a sudden flash, that vanishes in a moment: it is but a transient fit of devotion, which passes almost as soon as it is kindled, and their tears are like those of children, soon excited, and dried up as soon, with the temptation of some pleasing trifle that is offered to their fancy.

Finally, as soft bodies are the most easily susceptible of impressions, but lose them with the same ease as they received them; so the persons described in this second character having no solidity, that is no steadiness in their hearts; though they *receive the word with joy*, and are tenderly affected with it for a time, yet they are as ready to part with it, as they were ready to receive it: so that upon the first difficulty they meet with, or temptation that assaults them, all the fruit that might have been expected from those sensible impressions, miscarries; their good purposes are forgot, and they return to their customary weakness, in the same manner as if they never had been made at all: so their lives pass in a continual circle of raising and falling; of making good resolutions one day, and breaking them the next; of projecting many things, and going through with nothing.

Hence it appears plainly, that the *second* cause of spiritual barrenness, marked out in this parable, is properly the

vice of *inconstancy;* which, though it be not so bad as *hardness of heart,* is notwithstanding an absolute obstacle to salvation: for unless this evil be effectually remedied, and the soul fixed upon such solid principles, as to render her firm and steady in the duties of a Christian life, it is impossible the great work of salvation should ever be accomplished; nay, our very best resolutions will prove abortive, and the most religious designs come to nothing.

We must therefore search into the root of this distemper, and then consider what is proper for its cure: now some attribute it to a natural levity, or fickleness of temper; but this being only a defect or weakness of nature, persons may be subject to it in trivial or indifferent matters, and yet be very firm and steady in all duties God requires of them: because, if the law of God, and principles of faith, be their rule, as that is fixed and unchangeable, their practice guided by it will be so too: others therefore ascribe it to a want of *faith;* but though *constancy* cannot be without faith, yet *faith* may be without constancy; because a foundation may be laid, and no superstructure raised upon it. It is true, if all believers were like St. Paul's just man, who *lives by faith,* then all who had his virtue would likewise have a sufficient degree of Christian constancy, to carry them steadily on through all the difficulties and necessary trials of virtue: but the case is quite otherwise; for many Christians are sound in faith, but very corrupt in their manners: and it is for this reason, that as their sins are more enormous than those of infidels, who never had the light of faith, so will their punishment be also more severe; because, having been illuminated from above, they have not followed the light God as bestowed upon them, nor conformed their lives to the faith they professed. Faith therefore is not properly wanting to them, but they are wanting to their faith: they believe like Christians, but act as unbelievers, in permitting every temptation to divert them from the pursuit of virtue, and put them out of the way of salvation.

But what then is the cause of this extraordinary weakness, in the important concerns of eternity; which, if men were guilty of it in temporal matters of any consequence, would expose them to contempt and laughter? I answer, that the true root of their inconstancy is no other than some predominant passion, or habit, which inclines them

strongly to what is forbid, and gives them a violent repugnance to what is commanded. The reason hereof is clear; because, whoever is not possessed with any passion which inclines him strongly to evil, and gives him an aversion to his duty, will have no great difficulty to avoid the one, and perform the other. Now, it is not probable, that a person who is not wholly lost to principles of conscience and religion, will be guilty of frequent trespasses, either in doing what he is bound to avoid, or omitting what he is bound to do, if obeying the law of God, and performing his duty, be not very painful to him. When therefore, his transgressions are very frequent, notwithstanding his reiterated purposes to the contrary, it is an evident mark that the difficulty of obeying is very great. And what can be the root of this difficulty or repugnance but some passion, which not finding its account in the performance of his duty, is importunate and pressing to be gratified, even in contradiction to the law of God?

It is true indeed, as long as any passion lies dormant, as it often does, the making of good purposes, and forming designs of amendment, cost nothing. But when this claim is over, and the passion, awakened by some violent temptation, begins again to grow importunate and craving for a compliance; then the person who before thought he should do every thing, and made the best purposes in the world, does just nothing at all, but yields tamely to its importunity, and is again as much, if not more a slave to it, than he was before. For how should a person ever go on steady in the way of virtue, as long as he has a strong weight or bias upon his heart, which is continually drawing him another way? Now every passion is as a weight or bias upon the heart, which draws and presses it towards its proper object; and though the party that labours under it may make some weak efforts, from time to time, to resist its violence, as long as that passion keeps its hold, his struggling will be but like the languid and drowsy endeavours of a person overwhelmed with sleep, who scarce raises himself up, but drops down again.

This, therefore, is the general root of that changeableness and inconstancy of mind, by which sinners are so often diverted from executing the best resolutions they make for their eternal good. This is properly that *rock* or *strong ground* which hinders the *seed of God's word* from enter-

ing deep into their hearts, and becoming fruitful in good works; and whilst this *rock* subsists, no good can be expected of them. They may *receive the word with joy;* they may be tenderly affected with it, and shew a willingness to obey it; nay, form designs in their mind to undertake and carry on effectually the work of their eternal salvation; but till that passion be banished from their hearts, the seed of the divine word can take no root; all their good purposes will be blasted; all their designs miscarry; their very best inclinations will remain fruitless; and they will ever remain the same fickle and inconstant creatures; ever false to themselves and to God, ever promising, and never performing, ever beginning, and never finishing anything they are about.

This, I say, will be their condition as long as they are over-ruled by any passion: and therefore, the only effectual remedy for their inconstancy is to destroy that passion which is the root of it. But how must that be done? For here lies the difficulty: it is certain, in the *first* place, that their chief trust and confidence must be in God; if this principle be not deeply fixed in their hearts, all their endeavours will be vain. *Secondly,* it is no less certain, that notwithstanding their entire trust and confidence in God, they must labour no less heartily themselves, than if the whole success depended upon their own industry and application. And, *thirdly,* it is evident, from experience, that no passion can be subdued unless it be starved out, and every thing removed from it that gives strength and nourishment to it. These three principles, joined together, will put them into the method established by God's providence, and oblige them to make use of all the general and particular remedies their condition stands in need of.

The general ones, in consequence to the principles established, are humble and fervent prayer, a daily examination of conscience, the use of the sacraments, keeping out of idleness, and avoiding the usual occasions of relapses: these are all excellent means, to weaken by degrees, the inclination or passion, though ever so perverse and obstinate in its nature; provided they be performed with a serious application, as gives ground to judge that the parties concerned are in earnest: for if, in performing the duties of prayer, and other devotions mentioned, they

seldom go beyond the outward form, it is all children's play, and no more than a mock fight, or shooting at an enemy with powder, which makes a noise, but does no execution: and therefore it is no wonder if these prescriptions prove often ineffectual: the fault lies not in the remedies, but in the persons who content themselves with the outward form, but neglect the inward dispositions with which they are to be made use of.

As to particular remedies, the parties concerned must be, in a great measure, their own physicians, and prescribe to themselves: because, since no man can understand the particular nature of their passion so well as themselves, it follows, that they themselves, if they will but proceed sincerely, are the best judges of what is most proper to be applied to it. Experience has taught them the secret springs by which it moves, the objects that inflame it, the first symptoms of an approaching temptation, the degrees by which it works upon the imagination, the remote and immediate occasions of relapses, and how the immediate ones are ushered in by those that are more remote. The experimental knowledge they have of all these things will be their best guide to direct them what to do, and what to avoid, in many particular cases; in which their confessors can do no more than to give them general rules, that they must be watchful to resist the very first beginnings of temptations, and keep at the greatest distance possible from every thing that contributes to inflame or nourish the distemper: for though many of these may be innocent in themselves, at least not directly sinful, yet they are always leading to sin, in respect of the persons I speak of; who, if they be not careful to avoid them when they have it in their power, will often find themselves drawn into the snare before they are aware of it; because the remote occasions will insensibly draw on the immediate ones, and then the temptation will prevail, and all the good purposes they have made will signify nothing.

I will now speak briefly of the *third* and *last* cause of spiritual barrenness, or obstacle to salvation, marked out in the following words: *And some fell among thorns, and the thorns, growing up together with the corn, choked it.* Which is thus expounded by Christ: *But that which fell among thorns, are they who have heard the word, but with the solicitudes, the riches and pleasures of life, going are*

choked, and bring forth no fruit. The word *going,* imports the same as *by degrees,* or, *in process of time;* because the thorns that grow up with corn choke it not all at once, but gradually: and when our Saviour says, that the persons marked out in this part of the parable, *are they who hear the word,* we must add to it, according to a learned interpreter, *and receive it,* nay, receive it in such a manner, that it even takes deep root in their hearts, and would grow up to its full ripeness, were it not choked by the *thorns* that *grow up with it.* For corn is in no danger of being spoiled by weeds, till it be considerably grown up. So that the person represented in this character, approach still some degrees nearer than the former to the happy state of those who are signified by the *good ground,* which *brings forth a hundred fold.* For the *word* is both heard and received by them, it enters into their hearts, it takes root, it grows up to a considerable height, and yet, for want of some pains and care to pluck up the thorns that grow with it, it is choked by degrees, and brings forth no fruit. *Going they are choked.*

But what are the *thorns* which choke the growing corn? St. Luke mentions three: the *solicitudes,* the *riches,* and *pleasures* of life: But St. Matthew reduces them to two, *solicitudes* and *riches:* because *riches* considered as an obstacle to salvation, include *pleasures,* as being the means by which they are procured.

For riches would not hinder salvation, but rather facilitate and promote it, were they not abused by their predecessors, in being made instrumental to those pleasures which draw their hearts from God, and link them insensibly to this world: the same is to be said of the *solicitudes* of this life; they are *thorns* to the soul, when they engage the heart so wholly in their interest as to take it off from the concerns of a better life: for then, though the seeds of piety and virtue were once deeply laid, they are stifled in the crowd and hurry of temporal affairs, and in the end *bring forth no fruit.*

This is the moral of this part of the parable, and it sets forth in lively colours, the character of those unfortunate Christians who, after a virtuous education, and considerable progress in the way of everlasting happiness, entering into the world, are by degrees corrupted by it. *Going they are choked,* either by being engaged in a multitude

of affairs, which encumbers them with *solicitudes*, and leave no room for the concerns of their souls, or by giving themselves over to its *pleasures*, which gain ground insensibly upon their affections, and exclude the love of God, by the same degrees as they introduce that of the world; so that *solicitude* and *pleasures*, though things of a different nature, agree in being equally, by their excess, an obstacle to the growth of virtue. The *solicitudes* of the world fill the heart, and its *pleasures* corrupt it; and both the one and the other infuse a worldly spirit, inconsistent with the spirit of God. The misfortune of those, who are lost by an excess of *solicitude*, is mostly occasioned by their having too much business; and the ruin of those, who are corrupted with pleasures, is mostly owing to their having no business at all: though both parties might find a middle way to steer their course in, between these two rocks, without splitting upon either: for, as to your men of business, if avarice and ambition were not consulted, a great part of that business, which overcharges men with solicitude, and makes them forget Almighty God, might be retrenched; and then they would find time enough for the performance of such Christian duties as would be a means not only to preserve the love of God in their hearts, but to sanctify even their temporal employments, and consecrate all that to God which is usually sacrificed to covetousness and pride.

But as to those, who under pretence of having no business at all, run into the opposite extreme of divertisements and pleasures, to murder time, which would otherwise lie heavy upon their hands, these persons cannot deny, at least but that they have one necessary and indispensable business to do, which is the saving of their souls; and the more inexcusable they are if they neglect it. What reasonable pretence can hinder them from assisting daily at the *holy sacrifice*, when they have the opportunity to do it? What can hinder them from saying daily the short office of our Blessed Lady, and the Penitential Psalms, with the long litanies; and spending one half hour at least in spiritual reading, besides a short half hour allotted for their evening prayers? These duties constantly performed, will daily cut off between two and three hours from idleness, and discharge them of a part of that time which is a burden to them: if the prescription appears disagreeable,

it is a sign their souls are very much indisposed, and stand highly in need of it.

However, since notwithstanding all this, there will still remain many vacant hours, and but too many indeed, to be wholly thrown away upon pleasures, means may be found to prevent this loss, in such a manner as cannot be said to be inconsistent with a Christian life: for though the persons here chiefly spoken of are not, as I suppose, under a necessity of seeking any lucrative employment to gain a livelihood; yet I can see no reason to excuse them from an obligation of applying themselves to something that is serious, either for their own improvement, or the service of their neighbour. Has Almighty God given them no talent of which he will demand an account of at the last day? As to the ladies, they are usually brought up to some work suitable to their condition, in which they may employ their vacant hours in a very Christian manner. And as to the gentlemen, (though many of them have no particular calling, which, however is a very great misfortune) I presume at least they are not wholly incapable of some serious business, for I suppose they can, at least read and write; and how much time may be profitably spent this way, if not for others, at least for themselves? They may likewise amuse themselves with some handicraft or mechanical employment, as many persons of quality do, for no other end than to keep themselves out of idleness, or such parties of pleasure as seldom keep within the bounds of what is innocent, even when they are not absolutely sinful in themselves.

If they say they are not of an humour to set themselves to any serious employment, they may as well say they are not of an humour to live like Christians: they are not of an humour to do penance for their sins: in fine, they are not of an humour to save their souls. For that is the plain English of it: since it is certain, that as long as their hearts and affections are running mad after the pleasures of this world, they will not only never be of an humour to do any thing that is serious, but the commandments themselves, and all the most essential duties of a Christian life, will at least be sacrificed to sloth and pleasure.

But it is now time to end; and since great numbers are concerned in this latter part of the parable, I mean all those who are either too busy, or too idle, to apply themselves to the concerns of their souls; the best advice I can

give them, is to consider seriously that time is short; that there is an eternity to come, that Heaven is not to be obtained but by the practice of such means as Christ has prescribed; that the *solicitudes* and *pleasures* of life, if not moderated by a Christian prudence, are declared by him to be the obstacles of salvation: finally, that everything is to be looked upon as vanity and folly which, though pleasing for the present to our inclinations, puts us in danger of perishing eternally.

FIFTY-SIXTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE SIN OF CONCEALMENT IN CONFESSION.

Jesus was casting out a devil, and the same was dumb. Luke xi. 14.

The person out of whom Christ cast the *dumb devil*, here spoken of was only possessed in body: but there are but too many in the world possessed in soul by the same evil spirit.—Among these we may reckon all such as, out of sloth or shame, defer from time to time to have recourse to the sacrament of penance: the neglect whereof affords their enemy opportunity to fortify himself so strongly in their souls, that it becomes very difficult to dislodge him.

But none are more fully under the tyrannical power of the *dumb devil* than those unhappy Christians, who overcome with shame, choose to profane the most sacred mysteries of religion, and continue under the burden of an oppressed conscience, by wilfully concealing some sin, or aggravating circumstance of it, rather than give glory to God, and ease to their own souls, by an humble discharge of this duty; and, how infinitely more deplorable is the condition of these persons, that if their bodies were delivered up to satan to be tormented by him? For all this might be without prejudice to their eternal happiness, because their own wills might have no share in it: but these unhappy wretches are the wilful authors of their own misfortune. They are under the power of the devil, because they are resolved to be so. They are dumb, not for want of power, but of will, to speak: and though they have the means of their deliverance always ready at hand, if they will but open their mouths to receive the benefit of it, they choose to continue under their bondage, rather than give themselves

the trouble of a momentary humiliation, to be delivered from it.

Since, therefore, the undergoing the humiliation of confessing all our sins, is an indispensable duty, I shall treat of it at large in this and the following discourse, intending to represent the greatness of the *sin*, as well as *folly*, a person commits in concealing anything that is considerable in confession : the folly of it shall be shewed in my next discourse; and at present, I shall only explain the proper nature and aggravations of it.

To conceal a sin in confession, is a crime of that nature, that we cannot doubt but the devil himself is the great prompter of it: he has a double aim in tempting men to it: *First*, to gratify his own pride and malice, to which nothing is more insupportable than the humble confessions of repenting sinners; and 2*dly*, to perpetuate the slavery of those whom he has already in his power; well knowing, that if he can but get them into his snare, he is secure of them ; we may therefore be well assured, that whenever the shame of confessing any sin begins to gain ground so far upon us as to put us upon deliberating whether we shall or shall not do our duty, it is the devil suggests these dangerous thoughts ; it is the mortal enemy of our souls endeavours to tie up our tongues, that the hands of mercy may be for ever shut against us ; it is the father of lies makes us ashamed of what alone can procure us a solid glory. *The devil*, (says St. Chrysostom,) *inverts the order established by God : for the order established by him is, that we should be ashamed to sin, and glory in confessing our sins ; the devil inverts this order, and gives us a confidence to sin, and a shame to confess.*

Whilst he tempts men to sin, it is his business to make them throw off all shame ; this being one of the greatest restraints Almighty God has laid upon human nature: but when the sin is accomplished, and the party concerned begins to look back with a heavy heart upon the offence he has committed, then the devil returns upon him with new snares, and instead of robbing him of shame, as before, he heightens it as much as he can ; instead of hiding from him the deformity of his sin, he sets it in the broadest light before him, and represents it under the most frightful aggravations ; not to raise in his heart a penitential abhorrence of it, but to overwhelm him with such an excessive con-

fusion for what he has done, the difficulty of confessing becoming insupportable, it may engage him in a desperate resolution of either utterly abandoning the sacrament of penance, the only sanctuary left to secure his return to God, or, what is worse, to play the hypocrite, and impose upon his confessor.

This is the devil's ordinary stratagem, which has ever brought him in such a plentiful harvest of souls, that it is no wonder he should still continue to practise the same cheat upon us. But the great wonder is that Christians, who have light, both of faith and reason to guide them, should be so easily drawn into the snare, and induced to commit a sin attended with so many aggravations, that we may properly call it a complication of many crimes wrapped up in one single act.

For, *first*, the party concerned is guilty of *sacrilege;* that is, the abuse of a sacrament instituted by Christ to restore grace to his soul; and this abuse is but the fore-runner of another of a much blacker nature, viz. a sacrilegious communion, which follows of course.

2*dly*, He is guilty of *hypocrisy*, in making use of a solemn act of religion to cover a sin; in masking a diabolical pride with a counterfeit humility; in affecting to appear most religiously devout, when he is most sacrilegiously wicked; and, finally, in pretending a repentance for sins past, when he is both actually increasing his former guilt, and designing soon after to add to it another most grievous sin.

3*dly*, He is guilty of *ingratitude*, in despising the greatest pledges of God's goodness towards him, and frustrating, as far as in him lies, the designs of his mercy; nay, using his blessings as arms to fight against him.

However, these are but the inseparable circumstances of this sin; but its proper and specific malice consists in being a wilful and premeditated *lying to the Holy Ghost:* for the better understanding whereof it is to be observed, that when a Priest officiates in the *sacred tribunal of Penance*, he acts there as God's representative, and public minister of Jesus Christ. Now whatever affront is offered to a public minister, especially when he acts as such, reflects upon him whose minister he is: so that the behaviour of a person, presenting himself before the minister of Christ, in order to treat with him about the important concerns of salvation, and the making of a solid and lasting peace with God, his

behaviour, I say, is to be considered no otherwise than as if Christ himself were visibly present to him; and by consequence, all dissimulation and double dealing used with a confessor, during the actual administration of his sacred function, is imposing upon God himself; and *lying* to the one is the same as *lying* to the other.

Now, to proceed gradually in shewing the nature of this sin, let us first consider how hateful all sorts of *lying* are to God. There are *six things* (says Solomon, Prov. vi. 16.) *which the Lord hateth;* and the second of these is a *lying tongue:* again, in his 12th chapter he tells us that *lying lips are an abomination to the Lord:* and therefore in the 30th chapter, he humbly prays to God to *remove from him all lying words.* Now the reason hereof seems to be, because *lying* is directly opposite to one of God's attributes, to wit, *truth:* and since he cannot but love his own divine perfections, it follows that he cannot but hate whatever is directly opposite to any of them.

But to be more fully convinced of the hatred God bears to *lying*, let us consider how odious a quality it is accounted even among men: for though man's reason be much obscured by the sin he brings into the world, and the numberless passions it gives birth to, which are as so many dark clouds about the soul; yet, amidst this darkness, every one has still light enough to discern, in some measure, the beauty and loveliness of truth; and the same glimpse of light, by which we see the admirable beauty of this virtue, discovers at the same time the deformity of its opposite vice: whence it is that all men in the world naturally hate a *lying tongue;* for proof whereof I need but offer this similar instance, that no man tender of his credit can bear the imputation of it; and that one of the greatest affronts that can be put upon a man of honour is to give him the lie; a sure mark that it is judged an infamous quality, which sinks a man to a certain degree of meanness, and ranks him with the scum of mankind: nay, even those who are most addicted to it both hate it in others, and hide it as industriously as they can from being remarked in themselves, as appears in the trouble and concern they betray when taxed with it, and the confusion they suffer when convicted of it.

Hence it appears that *lying* is not only universally detested, but that the opinion men have of its deformity proceeds from an inbred principle of nature, and is so deeply

rooted that nothing can efface it. And what wonder is it then that *lying lips*, (as Solomon has told us,) should be *an abomination to God?* For if men, corrupted as they are with sin, and blinded with passion, are, by a certain irresistible impression of nature, so enamoured of the admirable beauty of truth, that they cannot but regard a *lying tongue* as a thing worthy of hatred and aversion; how much more odious and hateful must then this vice be to the pure eyes of God, who fully comprehending the infinite excellency of his own divine perfections, whereof *truth* is one, has also a clear and comprehensive knowledge of the deformity of falsehood, lying, and dissimulation, which are the vices opposite to this charming virtue? He must certainly hate the one as much as he loves the other.

However, there are several degrees in the sin of *lying*, some of which are of a much fouler complexion than others. As for instance, to be casually surprised into a trivial or officious lie is by all judged but a venial sin; but to make a practice even of such lies, or to stand out stiffly in a deliberate or studied lie, (though no farther mischief attends it,) cannot but be very displeasing to God, because it betrays a strong affection to it; and a wilful affection to any sin whatever is a very bad disposition.

Yet deliberate lies too have their degrees, which are mostly taken from the different reciprocal relations of the parties concerned; thus any insincerity or falsehood is a greater offence in persons professing a mutual confidence in each other, than in others who are wholly free from such engagement. The same may be said of the relation of a child to a parent, or of a subject to a person vested with public authority; both of which give an aggravation to the sin of *lying;* for though truth and fair dealing be a debt we owe to all mankind, yet some have doubtless more title to it than others: so that though studied and premeditated lying be always a very ill thing, it is never more detestable than when nothing but candour and sincerity is, upon some special title, justly expected on the one hand, and expressly professed on the other.

Now then, to return to the matter before us, I leave every one to judge, from the considerations proposed, what sort of sin it must be to lie to a confessor: for, if all sorts of lying, but especially premeditated and studied lying, be very hateful to God, as I have fully shewed; if to dissemble

and play the hypocrite with a parent or superior, or any other person, to whom we owe and profess nothing but sincerity and candour, be yet a fouler sort of lying than when it is only practised towards an indifferent person, how hateful a thing must it be to come with a predetermined and deliberate lie to a minister of Christ? Who, besides his being a spiritual father, and one to whom we make profession of the greatest confidence, in seeming to trust him with the very secrets of our hearts, is, over and above, by virtue of his function, the representative of Jesus Christ; how detestable, I say, is it to judge and dissemble with a person of his character, since lying to such a one is not lying to a man, but to God himself, as I have already told you.

And can a Christian think of such a sin without horror? Is it not a crime that justly deserves to be detested, with the greatest hatred and aversion? If Christ should manifest himself visibly to us, durst we have the boldness to dissemble with him, or attempt to pass a lie upon him? And is it not the same affront, whether he be present to us in his own person, or in the person of his minister? It is so without dispute; since he has expressly declared, that *he who despises his ministers, despises him; and he who despises him despises his Father, who sent him.* For, if to despise God's ministers be to despise God himself; to lie to God's minister, is to lie to God himself: as it is yet farther declared by St. Peter upon a certain occasion; wherein God thought fit to manifest his hatred to this sin, by so severe and exemplary a judgment as struck the whole Church with terror and amazement.

I presume you all guess I mean the tragical end of Ananias and Saphira; who, having sold an estate, pretended, as other Christians had done, to bring the whole price of it to St. Peter: whereas, in effect, they had kept back some part of it for their own private use. But St. Peter, knowing by divine revelation the cheat they came to put upon him, was deeply wounded at heart; and being moved with a just indignation, spoke thus to Ananias: *Why has satan tempted thy heart to lie unto the Holy Ghost? For thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.* Whereupon the unfortunate wretch, as one thunderstruck, fell down dead at St. Peter's feet; and a few minutes after, his wife, who had been an accomplice with him in his crime, received the same reward of her hypocrisy.

This is the account given us by St. Luke of the exemplary judgment that befel this unhappy couple: and it is to be particularly observed, that St. Peter styles their sin *a lying to the Holy Ghost*, for though he knew the cheat was immediately intended and practised upon himself, yet inasmuch as he was Christ's *minister*, he considered the injury as done to God himself: and so the punishment was proportioned accordingly. However, we may farther observe, that in the case of these two persons, so severely punished, there was neither *sacrilege* nor *injustice;* but the whole charge against them was *lying* and *hypocrisy:* whereas, in the case of a false hearted penitent, besides foul dealing, dissimulation, hypocrisy, and *lying to the Holy Ghost*, there is over and above, as I have already observed, a sacrament profaned, God's blessings abused, his mercies trampled upon, and the most effectual means of amendment turned into an occasion of greater sins: so that all circumstances duly weighed, it plainly appears, that the crime of a counterfeit penitent is far more grievous in itself, and by consequence more detestable in the sight of God, than the sin he thought fit to express his hatred to, by such a terrifying and exemplary judgment.

But does he then let this sin go unrevenged? No surely: for though the criminal suffers no present punishment in body, his soul falls under the malediction of God in the very instant he commits the fact. So that whilst his deluded confessor, acting to the best of his knowledge, is busy in pronouncing his absolution, Almighty God, who cannot be imposed upon, looks down upon him with indignation, and instead of *cancelling the hand-writing that was against him*, ratifies it in the court of Heaven; and from his invisible tribunal, dooms his soul to an increase of torments answerable to the increase of his guilt.

It is true, the time of life being a time of mercy, the sentence pronounced against him may be reversed, provided he renders himself worthy of it: and in regard hereof, he is ever bound to acknowledge God's infinite goodness, in allowing him that time of forbearance which he refused to those who were guilty of a less grievous sin: nay, this consideration alone furnishes motive enough to raise in his soul the greatest detestation of the sin he has committed; and since it is without dispute that God expects he should make this use of the forbearance he favours him with, if he

neglects to do it he only lives on to his greater condemnation; and it had been happier for him had the same judgment which followed Ananias and Saphira so close at the heels, also overtaken him at the very instant he not only imitated but out-did their crime.

I shall close my discourse with an admonition to all such as are charged with the government of children, to use their utmost watchfulness and care to bring them up with the greatest abhorrence possible of the vice of *lying*. The particular reason of this caution is, because (besides that *lying* is a very bad quality in itself, and the mother of many other ill ones, that either spawn from it, or take shelter under it,) there is one very great mischief attending it, which many perhaps have never thought of, viz. That a habit of *lying* out of the confessional, is a fair step towards *lying* in confession. For it is with this, as with all other vices, its progress is gradual, and gains upon us almost imperceptibly.

Children begin at first with little excuses, very near a-kin to lies, to cover their ordinary faults, and prevent their being chid or corrected by their parents. By doing this often, and finding the benefit of it, they proceed insensibly to down-right *lying*, whenever it serves their turn. As this grows customary and familiar, the horror of it wears off; nature takes a bent that way; they grow hardened to it by degrees; and thus a false and insincere temper being contracted by a long custom of *lying* to men, dispose them insensibly to venture upon *lying* to God himself. For this reason, all those that are employed by children, should make it their business to inspire them, from their very infancy, with the love for truth, and hatred to lying: and in order to it, whenever this vice happens to be mentioned before them, it ought always to be spoken of with the utmost detestation, and represented in such colours as may give them a sensible horror of it.

But care should be also taken that children should always fare the worse for telling a lie, and the better for owning the truth. For if they find by experience, that they are ever in danger of being losers by lying, and sure of being gainers by speaking the truth, this will insensibly nourish in them an hatred of the one, and a love and esteem of the other; the effect whereof will be, that being brought up from their infancy with an aversion to all untruth, sincerity will become habitual, and almost natural to them: and

since the best security against sin is to keep at the greatest distance from it, it is evident that those who have an abhorrence even of any sort of lying, will not easily become guilty of the foulest part of it; and the saying of Christ will be verified in this, as well as other instances, viz. *He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater.* Luke xvi. 10.

FIFTY-SEVENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE FOLLY OF CONCEALING ANY SIN IN CONFESSION.

Be not ashamed to say the truth: for there is a shame that bringeth sin; and there is a shame that bringeth glory and grace. Eccl. iv. 24, 25.

THE confusion *that causeth death,* is that which hinders a sinner from laying open the true state of his conscience; without which his soul can never be restored to the life of grace. But the confusion which has *grace* in this life, and eternal *glory* in the next, for its reward, is that which a penitent submits to in becoming his own accuser. Whence it appears, that the concealment of any sin in confession is not only the addition of a most grievous sin, as has been proved in the former discourse, but is over and above the very highest strain of folly and madness, as shall be shewn at large in this Entertainment.

If a sinner, by imposing upon his confessor, could at the same time deceive Almighty God; if by concealing his sins from the knowledge of a man he could also hide them from the all-seeing eyes of Jesus Christ; finally, if his avoiding a momentary confusion in this life were a means to shelter him against eternal confusion hereafter, then indeed he would not altogether want encouragement to play the hypocrite, and deal unfairly with God's minister: and though in so doing he might be taxed with irreligion and sacrilege, he could not however be accused of weakness and folly.

But alas, the case is quite otherwise: the ulcers of his soul, though ever so industriously concealed from the eyes of men, lie always open to the eyes of God: the very sin which he seeks to hide from his confessor, is already registered in the great book of accounts; and nothing but an humble confession of it can hinder it from appearing against him to his everlasting confusion, both at the hour of death,

and the great day of assizes: and is it not then an unaccountable folly to refuse a compliance with a duty, when there is no prospect of an advantage to encourage a person's transgressing against it, and his submitting to it is the only means to rescue him from everlasting evils?

Suppose a criminal condemned to die, should have his pardon offered to him for only owning his crime in private, to one deputed by the judge, would he not be thought to have lost his reason if he should refuse to submit to such easy terms? All men would certainly pronounce him guilty of excessive madness and cruelty to himself. Since therefore Almighty God imposes no harder condition on sinners, and engages his word to deliver those that submit sincerely to it from eternal death, and the endless miseries their sins have deserved; what madness and infatuation it is to reject so great a mercy, and rather choose to continue under the sentence of eternal damnation, than purchase their pardon at so cheap a rate.

You will say, perhaps, the condition required is not so easy as is pretended; since to declare one's secret sins is a thing to which man's nature has the greatest repugnance: but to silence these reasonings of human pride, let us suppose the ordinary punishment of every sin we commit were to have it exposed as long as we live to the view of every one we converse with, and then I ask, whether in this case a sinner would not be very mercifully dealt with, if to deliver himself from this public and lasting confusion, he were only obliged to confess his sins in private to a single person? And whether his refusing to accept this condition would not draw on him the imputation of folly and madness? the case admits of no dispute, since common prudence directs every one to choose the lesser of two evils.

This then being supposed, will clearly answer all difficulties pretended on the score of natural repugnance to the duty in question: For let there be the greatest repugnance in nature to it, if submitting be the only means a sinner has left him to prevent evils infinitely greater even in the same kind, than what he pretends to avoid; his refusing to comply with the condition cannot be excused from the most extravagant weakness and folly. It remains then only to shew, that the shame and confusion which will fall upon an impenitent sinner in the life to come, will not only be infi-

nitely greater than what he apprehends in confessing his sins, but will, in every respect, exceed any confusion possible in this world, even though all his secret sins were to be continually exposed to the view of every one that sees or knows him.

To make this clearly out, let us but compare the one with the other. And, *first*, as to their duration, it is plain that the longest confusion a person can suffer in this life cannot last longer than life itself; death will infallibly put a period to it: but the confusion of the reprobate in the life to come will last for ever.

But will the confusion of the reprobate in the life to come be only more lasting? no, it will also be greater, beyond all comparison, than any we can suffer in this life; *first*, because the monstrous deformity of sin, both in relation to Almighty God and our own souls, will by many degrees be then more clearly seen by us than it is ever possible it should be in this world, where all our ideas in things are obscure, weak, and imperfect. And, 2*dly*, because for one that can know our sins now, even though they were manifested to all that converse with us, or hear of us, millions will know them hereafter: it being an undoubted truth, that *God will*, in the life, *bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and manifest the counsels of every man's heart.* Now since the root of shame is nothing but the idea we have, partly of the foulness of our sins, and partly of what others think of us upon that score, it is evident that the clearer idea we have of their enormity, and the greater the number is of those by whom they are known, the greater also must be the shame occasioned by them, and consequently the eternal confusion of impenitent sinners in the life to come, will be so excessively heightened from both these causes, that nothing in the world can come near it.

Alas, poor wretches! They are here afraid of a little confusion before a single man, and they reflect not that they must be exposed before a numberless multitude of men and angels; which, joined with their own clear sight of the blackness of their sins, appearing then before them in their own true colours, without cover or disguise, will throw so heavy a load of shame upon them that they will even wish to sink into the ground, and hide themselves in the darkest dungeons of hell, to avoid being seen either by themselves or others: but their shame will pursue them even thither,

and be as everlasting as their flames, *that will never be quenched*, and their *worms that will never die:* because, as the deformity of their sins will be ever before their eyes, so will this gnawing and tormenting thought be ever present to them, that they are to be eternally hated and despised by God, and all his saints and angels.

Whence I leave you to judge, whether Almighty God deals not very mercifully with us, in putting it into our power to exchange this terrible and everlasting confusion, due to our sins, for a momentary humiliation before one single person; who, as you all know, is under the strictest obligation of an inviolable secrecy that human and divine laws can lay upon him; and whether our refusing to submit to such easy terms of reconciliation be not a weakness and folly, more becoming a man out of his senses than one that pretends to judgment and reason?

However, to convince you still more fully of this truth, I shall make it appear, that confessing our sins is recommendable, even for the present ease it gives; and that the confusion which usually attends it has no real foundation, but is usually grounded upon mistake and deluded imagination. As to the *first*, I have experience clearly on my side; for every one that is not wholly given up to a reprobate sense, must own from his own experience, that sin upon a conscience is a thorn that never ceases to gall and fret till it be plucked up. It is an imposthume in the body; and as it is impossible for the body to be at ease till the imposthume be opened, and the corrupt matter let out, so it is no less impossible for a sinner's conscience to be at ease, till it be fully laid open by a sincere confession, and so cleared of the corruption that oppressed it. So that let a sinner flatter himself as he pleases, experience will convince him, that nothing but plain dealing, and frankly declaring his sins, without artifice, shuffling, or disguise, will ever procure him that which is the greatest blessing of human life, a true and solid peace of mind.

And as to the *other* part, viz. That the confusion a penitent suffers in confessing his sins is all grounded upon mistake, I need but shew, that the fear he has to lose his confessor's esteem by it is wholly vain and imaginary: for it would be very strange if that which is the only means to restore a sinner to God's grace and favour, should lessen him in the opinion of God's minister. But the thing is quite

otherwise: *first*, because whatever guilt a person is charged with, an humble and sincere confession makes atonement for it; and is so far from discrediting the penitent, that nothing recommends him more effectually to the esteem, and even tenderest affection of his ghostly father; for it is then he regards the penitent as a true copy of the prodigal son returning to his father; it is then he rejoices for the recovery of the lost sheep, and invites all the saints and angels to share with him in his joy.

Secondly, Because truth and sincerity are such charming virtues, that a true penitent ever gains more that way than he can lose by being his own accuser. And,

Thirdly, Because though sin, whilst it subsists, may deservedly bring the party concerned under disesteem or contempt, yet, in relation to a penitent, it quite changes its nature: for it is then considered as a thing no longer in being, or as a thing that never was at all; because a sin once blotted out by repentance, is, in effect, the same, as to its guilt, as if it had never been committed. It is certainly so in the judgment of Almighty God; who, when a sinner returns seriously to him, forgets his sins past as utterly, and has the same love for him as if he never had been guilty of any: and therefore, every one ought to do that justice to his confessor, as to believe he understands his duty better than to entertain sentiments directly opposite to those of Almighty God; or to harbour in his heart an ill opinion of one whom he has reason to regard as a person honoured with the friendship of Almighty God.

It is true, a confessor cannot have an infallible assurance of the repentance of the party that presents himself before him: however, he is always bound to suppose it, as long as nothing appears to ground a contrary judgment; and every one may be assured, that one of the best marks he can have of the good disposition of a penitent, is, to find him frank and sincere in opening his conscience to him; whereas, if he has reason to suspect him guilty of double-dealing, he cannot but entertain a very uncomfortable opinion of him.

But let us, after all, suppose a person, by accusing himself, should, in some measure, forfeit the esteem of his confessor: is this a rational motive to play the hypocrite, and continue under the guilt of mortal sin? How many are there in the world who stick not to deal very plainly with their physicians, though they have the greatest repugnance

to it? And ought we not then to be as ready to suffer something in compliance with our duty to God, and to prevent irreparable mischiefs from falling upon us? Or are we not infinitely more cruel and barbarous to ourselves, in wilfully multiplying the moral distempers of our souls by a criminal silence, than if we took the same course to destroy our bodies?

But here I should be glad to ask a person concerned in this crime, what it is he proposes to himself? Does he ever intend to confess the sin he has concealed, or not?—If not, then he renounces all hopes of salvation, and resolves directly to damn himself: and what a desperate resolution is this in one, who believes there are eternal flames prepared for those who die in mortal sin? But, if he resolves to confess it some time or other, why not sooner as well as later? Nay, why not at first, as well as afterwards? For the longer he runs on in this course, the harder it will be to get out of it: because whenever he sets about it, besides his being then bound to declare the sin till then concealed, and the number of sacrileges since added to it over and above; all confessions since his first abuse of the sacrament being null and void, must be looked back into, and repeated.

And is not the ripping up of so many old sores, and the unravelling a conscience perplexed with a multiplicity of sins, a task that will put him to a much greater shame and confusion than what he pretends to decline at first? Is it not much easier to confess a single sin, whatever it be, than when it comes attended with a long train of other sins, besides the grievous aggravation of sacrilege? This therefore being the unavoidable consequence of sacrilegious confessions, in relation to one that is not resolutely bent upon damning himself, it is evident, that all delays and put-offs in this matter cannot but increase the very difficulty upon which they are pretended, and serve to no other purpose than to cut out work for sadder repentance, and a more mortifying shame.

But some perhaps depend upon an easier expedient, viz. of making one confession for all upon their death-bed; for then, say they, they care not what their confessors think of them. But suppose this fine project should miscarry; suppose they should die suddenly, or be out of their senses in their last sickness, what becomes of them then? Are

they not lost without remedy? However, allowing them the fairest chance such an unchristian design will admit of, it is but too much to be feared that they who confess not till they just feel themselves dropping into destruction, are so disposed at heart that they would not even confess then, had they any prospect of a longer life; and they must give me leave to tell them, that a confession made with this disposition is but a very unsafe bottom to hazard their salvation upon. Besides, what is done under a great fright and consternation, proceeding mostly from a mere servile fear, the confession and repentance a sinner is scared into by seeing hell-fire just before him, looks so like that of a man upon the rack, who is willing to say or do anything for a little ease, that there is all the reason in the world to suspect there is more of shew than reality in it.

I say not this to encourage despondency in any one that should prove so unhappy as to have put things upon the last hazard; because, whatever his case may be, endeavouring to repent, and make his peace with God, is certainly the best thing he can do at any time whatever; and the last moments of his life cannot be better employed than in a work so necessary as that of confessing and repenting.—However, I think myself bound to deter all men from hazarding their salvation upon so great an uncertainty, and letting things come to pass, that a death-bed repentance is all they have to depend upon.

In a word, Almighty God is not to be mocked; and those who designedly put off the confessing of their sins till they come to die, will, I fear, find by woful experience, that they have only played the devil's game for him, and been industrious in laying snares for their own souls. Let us beseech Almighty God to preserve all Christians from this fatal blindness, and infuse into their souls so large a portion of the spirit of truth, that they may ever abominate all insincerity or double dealing; but especially when the honour of his holy sacraments is concerned, and their own eternal interest lies at stake.

FIFTY-EIGHTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE FATAL CONSEQUENCES OF UNWORTHY COMMUNIONS.

He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself. 1 Cor. xi. 29.

Sacrilegious confessions (of which enough has been said) usually lead the way to unworthy communions; the fatal consequences whereof shall be the subject of this Entertainment.

Before I enter upon this subject I shall explain briefly the nature of this sin, which St. Paul expresses in the strongest terms possible when he tells us, that *Whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord.* 1 Cor. xi. 27. The reason whereof is thus given by St. Chrysostom: *Because,* (says he) *whoever approaches to this divine table unworthily, is like those who pierced the body of our Lord, not to drink, but to spill his blood:* That is to say, not to apply to themselves the spiritual fruit and benefit of it, but to profane it, and *trample it under foot,* according to St. Paul's expression in another place.

Whence it follows, that the sin of an unworthy communicant is *sacrilege* in the highest degree; because, the specific nature of this sin, consisting in an abuse or profanation of anything that is holy: the consequence is, that it is more or less enormous, in proportion to the holiness of the thing that is abused. A church is for example holy; and the altar and vessels belonging to it, are likewise holy; because they are consecrated to holy uses, and a contemptuous abuse of any of these things is sacrilege in a certain degree; though it is manifest they have no intrinsic holiness inherent in them, but are only holy from the relation they have to the infinite holiness of God, to whose service they are appropriated. But the blessed Eucharist is intrinsically, nay, infinitely holy, because it contains the very source and fountain of holiness, and it is literally true, that in it *dwells the Godhead corporeal.* So that it eminently excels the other sacraments in dignity; and is not merely an outward sign of grace, or channel through which it is conveyed to the soul, but the source itself, from which all grace and blessings flow.

This makes it plain, what I said just now, viz. That the sin of an unworthy communicant is *sacrilege in the highest degree :* because, as the thing profaned by him is superlatively sacrilegious and wicked; and whereas in other cases of sacrilege, the profanation regards at most but things that have a near relation to God, in this it is levelled against God himself, and strikes directly at him. And is not this a most enormous and detestable sin! Ought we not to have the greatest horror of it.

Now then let us see the hatred God bears to *sacrilege* of any kind whatever; and with what severity he has often punished it even in this life; that we may gather from thence what treatment a sacrilegious communicant may justly expect at his hands: for, in the first place, we find the bare profanation of the material temple of Jerusalem, represented by God himself as a crime he resolved to punish in the most exemplary manner. His words, Ezekiel the 5th are as follows: *Wherefore as I live, saith the Lord, because thou hast defiled my holy place with all thy abominations, therefore will I also destroy thee. Neither will my eye spare thee; neither will I have compassion on thee.* The rest of the chapter contains a frightful catalogue of the several punishments Almighty God designed to inflict on the Jews; and all for the crime there specified, viz. Their having defiled his holy temple; which was so hateful to him, that he resolved to revenge it with the utmost desolations of plague, war, and famine.

But the many sudden and exemplary judgments that have fallen upon persons in the very act of sacrilege, are the clearest testimony of God's severity in punishing this sin. Nadab and Abihu, having contrary to God's law, kindled their censers with profane or common fire, a flame issued from the Lord, as the scripture says, and devoured them in an instant. Oza was struck dead for only presuming to touch the ark when it was in danger of falling. All the inhabitants of Azotus were punished with cruel plagues, for having placed the said ark, which they had taken from the Israelites, in the temple of Dagon, and above fifty thousand Bethsamites were destroyed for not paying a due respect to it as it passed through their country. Balthazar, whilst he was profaning the holy vessels which his grandfather had transported out of the temple of Jerusalem to Babylon, was terrified with the apparition of a hand

writing the sentence of his condemnation, which was accordingly executed upon him that very night: and Heliodorus, attempting to execute the sacrilegious orders of his prince, was so severely chastised upon the very spot, by two angels appearing in defence of the holy place, that had not Onias interceded for him, it had cost him his life.

I omit innumerable other instances of God's wrath, manifested in his severe judgments on those that have the boldness either to violate holy places, or treat with disrespect things contrary to his service; but from the few I have produced, I leave every Christian to judge, whether the unworthy communicant has not reason to apprehend the severest effects of God's wrath. The matter will appear beyond all question, if we will but consider these three truths, 1*st*, that God never punishes any sin beyond what it deserves; 2*dly*, that his justice observes a proportion between the punishment and guilt of the offender; and 3*dly*, that the sacrilege of an unworthy communicant is beyond all measure more grievous than that of the forementioned offenders: for what comparison can there be between his crime and theirs? Are not the institutions of the Christian religion and its sacraments, especially the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, more holy than the rites and ceremonies of the *Mosaic law?* Or is not Christ himself infinitely more holy than the Jewish temple, or the *ark* or *vessels* belonging to it? The matter will admit of no dispute: nor can we therefore doubt but that the punishment of an unworthy communicant, who abuses God in his own person, will be proportionably more grievous, as he is more criminal, than they who only affronted him in the profanation of things that had a relation to him.

If then the very lowest degree of sacrilege was punished so severely by Almighty God, with what rigour will his justice one day revenge the wicked abuse of the *Holy of Holies?* If his indignation was so kindled against the profaners of his temple, with what fury will it discharge itself upon those who offer the boldest indignities to the majesty of God himself? Finally, if idolaters themselves where chastised with such remarkable severity, only for placing the *ark of the covenant* in the temple of Dagon, can Christians, who place the Son of God in temples defiled with sin, and inhabited by the devil, presume their crime will not draw upon them punishments answerable to the grievousness of it?

I own, I cannot but wonder that those who go to commit it, with full knowledge and deliberation, should not fear to fall into the hands of the *living God*, and be made examples of his justice upon the very spot; as some others who have had the boldness to attempt it, have been before them, if we may believe St. Cyprian and St. Chrysostom, who relate, that several in their times became distracted, upon their having communicated unworthily: St. Cyprian also relates, that some others were delivered over to be possessed and tormented by the devil for the same crime; and that a certain woman having in private eaten of meats that had been offered to idols, and coming not long after to communicate with other Christians, had no sooner received the blessed sacrament, but found herself inwardly tormented, as if she had taken some strong poison, and died immediately upon it, to the great terror of the whole assembly. The same father relates some other very terrifying examples of this nature, which I omit for brevity sake; these few sufficing to convince us how dangerous it is to be concerned in a crime which may draw the like judgment on us.

However, I must own these visible judgments are but rare, comparatively to the number of those that deserve them: for it is with this crime as with all others, they are always equally abominable in the sight of God: but he contents himself with having manifested his hatred of them, by some visible examples of his justice, upon particular offenders of each kind: the rest he remits for their deserved reward to the world to come. Thus he has sufficiently testified his hatred to *murder*, *adultery*, *perjury*, &c. by now and then afflicting exemplary chastisements upon murderers, adulterers, and those that foreswear themselves, though innumerable others, as guilty as they in the same kind, have escaped without any such judgments falling upon them.

And thus it is in reference to the crime we now speak of. Almighty God has abundantly taken care to let us know how provoking a sin it is to abuse his holy sacraments, by the exemplary rigour wherewith he has sometimes revenged it: many, perhaps more deeply concerned, seem to escape unpunished, and this emboldens them to persist in their crime: but let them not presume too long: the delay of payment only increases the debt, which will be, sooner or later, demanded to the last farthing. *Let not any one*

(says St. Cyprian, speaking of unworthy communicants,) *imagine he has escaped punishment, because it is as yet somewhat delayed; since God's delaying to chastise his sins ought rather to increase his fear.* For when Almighty God seems to take no notice even of those crying sins, and holds his hand, even when he is most provoked to strike, it is a sign the offender is reserved for an after blow, and marked out for an everlasting victim of the severest justice.

However, if we judge of things by faith, we shall find an unworthy communicant goes not unpunished, even in this life, though no visible judgment falls upon him: for though God sends him no visible plagues, he delivers up his soul to invisible ones, more fatal to him than if all the plagues of Egypt fell upon him: the first of these is the *death* of his soul, or rather an increase of death, if I may call it so: for though the death of the body admits of no degrees, but is the same whether it be occasioned by one or a thousand mortal wounds; it is not so with the death of the soul; every mortal sin is an increase of it, inasmuch as it removes the soul at a greater distance from God, makes her return to him more difficult, puts a fresh obstacle to her recovering the life of grace, and gives the devil a stronger hold of her.

Now if these be the effects of any additional guilt, the abuse of the sacraments must needs be attended with them in a far greater degree; because the very nature and effect of this sin is to obstruct the very source and fountain of grace, by rendering that which should nourish and strengthen the life of the soul, not only useless, but hurtful and poisonous to her, and converting the very best remedy against sin into an occasion of its greatest sense: and can anything either remove the soul farther from God, or put her more fully into the devil's power? Nothing certainly can so effectually establish his dominion, or fix him more firmly in the heart.

Hence follow two other fatal effects of unworthy communions, viz. *blindness* and *hardness of heart*, which seem to be prophetically denounced in these words of the Psalmist: *Let their table become a snare before them, and let that which should have been their welfare, become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened that they see not. Let them always bend under the weight of their sins. Pour forth thy indig-*

nation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. Nor is this to be wondered at, since the farther the soul is removed from the light of grace, and divine illustrations, and the more she is in the power of the prince of darkness, the more she must needs be blinded with her own sinful lusts; which meeting with no opposition from the grace of the sacraments to restrain them, lead her captive at pleasure, and engage her, by insensible degrees, in any sin corrupt nature shall suggest to her.

Whence follows of course the *hardness of heart,* which I have mentioned for the *third* effect of sacrilegious communions: however, there needs not many steps or degrees to bring men to this unhappy disposition, when their consciences are once sufficiently emboldened to attempt so black a crime with full knowledge. It is true the fear of human laws, or shame to be thought scandalous, may be a curb upon them; but surely no error of conscience can restrain them after this, for what crime can be frightful enough to startle a conscience, that has had the boldness to outrage God in his own person? Will a child that dares affront his father to his face, have the least regard to his commands upon a principle of duty? Will a subject that is bold enough to abuse his sovereign in his presence, stick to trample upon his laws? And what then will not a Christian be capable of committing, when he is once become so destitute of conscience, as to offer the greatest indignity, even to the king of heaven and earth? So that, what with the boldness of the crime on the one hand, and the withdrawings of grace, and the blindness it causes on the other, there is no sin contributes more effectually to harden men against all terror of conscience, and make them venture at anything, than that of wilful unworthy communions.

But what does all this usually tend to? It is thus the unworthy communicant, like a victim for slaughter, is insensibly prepared for the execution of the dreadful sentence that passed upon him when he committed the fact: for, at the instant the communicant receives the sacrament unworthily, Jesus Christ, erecting his invisible tribunal in the midst of his heart, pronounces sentence of eternal damnation upon him, or rather changes the sentence formerly incurred into a much severer one; and it is this St. Paul calls *eating and drinking judgment to himself:* because as often as he eats or drinks unworthily, he falls under a fresh

sentence of condemnation; which, in proportion to the new crime added, is ever more and more severe than the former.

It is true this sentence is not irrevocably fixed; God is ready to reverse it upon the sincerest repentance of the offender. However, it is most certain that some sinners are harder to be reclaimed and wrested out of the devil's power than others; and I fear unworthy communicants are of this unhappy number. They have abused God in his greatest blessings, and made void the best remedies provided by him for their cure; God's sanctifying grace is withdrawn from them; their enemy is doubly fortified against them; and the blood of Christ, the most sovereign balm for a wounded conscience, by their abuse of it, lies heavy upon their souls, and seems rather to cry for vengeance than plead for mercy. All these circumstances render the case of an unworthy communicant very deplorable, and look upon him with an ominous aspect, as seeming to forbode, that though the time of forbearance allowed him be absolutely improvable to the salvation of his soul, if he but takes the right course, it will probably only be abused by him to his greater condemnation.

In effect, all this came to pass in the case of the unfortunate Judas, who ought to be the terror, as he was the first example of an unworthy communicant; for he had no sooner eaten the consecrated morsel given him by Christ, but the devil entered into him, as St. John relates; and it is probable that in the very instant the devil confirmed him in his wicked design of betraying his master: for, from that instant forwards, he was delivered up to a reprobate sense; his soul was wholly blinded with avarice, which was his predominant passion; and his heart was so hardened, that neither the remembrance of past favours, nor the wonders he had been eye-witness of, nor the touching things our Saviour then said to him, could work any effect upon him; but hurried on by the evil spirit that possessed him, he went immediately forth to execute his wicked design, and every step he made after that contributed to hasten him towards the terrible judgment that was waiting for him, and fell upon him the very day after he had committed the crime, when, as you all know, he filled up the measure of his sins by self-murder, and died in despair.

Here you see the natural effects of an unworthy communion exactly represented in the reprobation, blindness, ob-

duracy, and final despair of him who gave the first example of it: I say the natural effects; for though God's infinite mercy, and the power of his grace, may and do many times prevent them, yet the nature of the crime itself is such as leads men by insensible degrees, to all the fatal dispositions I have remarked, which also naturally draw after them final impenitence and despair; especially if a person be so unhappy as to be overtaken in his last sickness, whilst he is yet in the practice of this crime. For I cannot imagine anything can be a heavier load upon a conscience in that case, or a more dead weight to sink him into despair, than when he reflects upon his death-bed, that he is going to appear before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, whose blood he has so often been guilty of; and that the only thing he has now to depend upon, is the grace of those very sacraments he has till then abused. These reflections, I say, will in the case supposed be a most violent temptation to despair; and the devil, who now labours to lull men's consciences asleep, whilst they are in perfect health, will not only be the first suggester of despairing thoughts in their last sickness, but make it his business to heighten them to the utmost of his power.

However, if this should happen to be the case of any person, he is bound to bear up with all his strength against any suggestions of that nature; to regard them as the last efforts of the devil's malice against him, and raise in his soul the greatest horror and detestation of them: because his salvation depends then absolutely upon his resisting them with all his force. But the securest way is not to let things go so far, but to prevent the danger of so violent a temptation by a sincere repentance in time of health; and since all sinners have it in their power to take this course, it is undoubtedly the interest as well as duty of every unfortunate Christian, who finds his conscience charged with the guilt of sacrilegious communions, not to let slip the opportunity which the divine bounty now favours him with, of applying to his soul the remedies necessary for his cure: and therefore, the farther he has departed from God, the more haste he must make to return to him, with the sincere repentance of a contrite and humble heart: and whereas his principal guilt consists in having abused his holy sacraments, his principal care must also be to repair those abuses, as far as in him lies: *first*, by making good the defects of all for-

mer confessions; at least from that time forwards, in which he first became guilty of that sin; *secondly*, by submitting to any terms of reconciliation his confessor shall propose to him; and, *thirdly*, by approaching ever after to the holy table with such a sincere humility, respect, and devotion, as may be some atonement for his abuses committed against it. If he performs these conditions, he may confidently rely upon the infinite goodness of his Redeemer; and animate himself with an assured hope, that the very blood, which would have called for vengeance had he continued in the abuse of it, will now cry so powerfully to Heaven for mercy, as to render him eternally partaker of the fruits of it.

FIFTY-NINTH ENTERTAINMENT.

CHRIST'S LOVE IN INSTITUTING THE BLESSED SACRAMENT.

A certain man made a great supper. Luke xiv. 16.

UNDER the figure of the supper here mentioned, is signified, *first*, that everlasting banquet in Heaven, where the blessed souls are *inebriated with the plenty of the house of God:* and 2*dly*, the sacrament of the holy Eucharist, which contains the real *Body* and *Blood of Jesus Christ:* and is a *supper truly great:* a supper indeed fitter for angels than men, and suited in all things to the infinite greatness and liberality of him that is the master of it; for is it not a banquet of inestimable value? Could either God's infinite wisdom have contrived, or his power produced, or his boundless liberality bestowed, anything greater upon us than his own self?

We may therefore with just reason call it a *great supper.* And yet how great soever this supper is, the very meanest of us have the honour to be invited to it; nay, we are not only invited, but even pressed and importuned to come; and our Saviour is highly displeased if we refuse to accept of his bounty: what infinite goodness is this! What inestimable love! To make ungrateful sinners the objects of the greatest bounty! To invite poor worms of the earth to be partakers of the bread of angels! To raise them from the dust, and place them at the table of the King of Heaven and earth?

But though this heavenly banquet, considered only in its

own intrinsic worth, be a gift of infinite value, and an undoubted pledge of the infinite love of the giver, yet there are some circumstances relating to the institution of it, which, if considered apart, will serve to heighten our idea of Christ's love, in bestowing this great gift upon us. These then shall be the subject of this Entertainment.

It is certain, that the affection of the party that bestows a favour, is a considerable addition to the intrinsic value of it; as, on the contrary, the very greatest gifts lose much of their value when they are presented with a certain coldness or indifference; because whatever the value of the gift be in itself, the heart and inclination of the giver is always more regarded than the gift itself. Now, nothing is a surer mark of the most affectionate disposition in the heart than when a person has a certain pressing desire, and earnest longing to bestow his favours. For as the first effect of true love is a desire to do good to the person we love, so a great desire to do good is an effect and mark of a great love, and the greater the desire is, the greater is the love from which it proceeds.

This leads me to the *first* circumstances, which in some measure discovers to us the greatness of our Saviour's love in instituting the sacrament of the holy Eucharist, viz. the earnest longing and desire he had to bestow this blessing on us. We have his own words to assure us of it: for being at his last supper with his apostles, and upon the point of instituting this holy banquet, he unbosomed himself to them in these affectionate words: *With longing have I desired to eat this passover with you.* He had already twice before that time eaten the *passover*, that is, the supper of the paschal lamb, with his apostles: but that was only an empty figure of the banquet he was now preparing for them: and therefore he said not that he had with longing desired to eat *the* passover, but to eat *this* passover with them before he suffered, meaning the last supper, wherein he designed to present them with the substance instead of the shadow, and feast their souls with the sacred flesh of the immaculate Lamb, which takes away the sins of the world. This has been the subject of his longing; this the supper he so earnestly desired to eat with them before he parted from them.

But though our Saviour had been silent, the action speaks clearly for itself: for nothing is a more convincing

proof of an earnest desire of anything, than when it is so prevalent upon us as to make us break through all obstacles to liberality and bounty, none can be imagined greater than that of notorious ingratitude; because nothing is either more provoking on the one hand, or renders a person more unworthy, even of the smallest favours on the other, than an ungrateful temper: all mankind is so possessed with this principle, that even the most generous spirits are scarce able to resist this provocation; and nothing but a more than ordinary inclination to do good can possibly prevail upon a person to bestow his favours, where he expects no other return than injuries and affronts.

Now then let us consider what returns our Saviour expected the world would make him for the great blessings he was going to bestow upon it; and whether he had not all the provocation imaginable to hinder him from accomplishing his loving design: for at the very time he instituted this heavenly banquet, he knew his own chosen people, who were already indebted to him for so many signal blessings, were assembled in council, in order to contrive his death: he knew that Judas, who was to be one of the first partakers of it, had already entertained thoughts to betray him, and would give the devil possession of his own soul as soon as the sacred body and blood should enter into his stomach. He knew, that thousands of Christians would become guilty of the same horrid sacrilege, by receiving this bread of angels with hearts already possessed by the devil; and that the greatest part of mankind would utterly disown the favour, by their disbelief of it: finally, he foresaw that, by bestowing it, he should expose his own sacred person to innumerable outrages and affronts; and that of all his favours, designed for our eternal salvation, none would be rendered more prejudicial to souls by their voluntary abuse of it than this so signal a pledge of his love: yet all this enormous ingratitude of the Jews and Gentiles, Heretics and Catholics, clearly foreseen and known, could not put a stop to his intended bounty, nor hinder him from prosecuting his loving design: so great was his desire to communicate himself to us, so great an inclination had he to bestow this heavenly blessing upon us.

Thus then we see the greatness of our Saviour's love in instituting this heavenly banquet, from the earnest desire

and longing he had to render us partakers of so great a blessing: but the motives of this earnest desire afford a *second* circumstance, discovering yet more fully the greatness of his love. The *first* of these motives is expressed by him in these words: *Do this in remembrance of me:* by which we are given to understand, that the end he proposed to himself, in instituting this heavenly banquet, was that it might be to us as a lasting token to remember him by; and is not this a most convincing proof of a very extraordinary love? Does it not at once discover both the tenderness of a father and affection of a friend? For the greatest token a dying parent can give of his tenderness for his children, is to bestow his best blessings upon them, and leave them heirs of all he is worth; and the surest mark a dying friend can give of his affection to his surviving friends, is to express a kind concern to be always remembered by them: so that our Saviour, in this one act, performed the part both of a friend and parent; for we may truly say, that in bequeathing to us his own precious Body and Blood, he made us heirs of a treasure of infinite value; and in this he shewed himself a most tender parent, and in leaving us this heavenly banquet, in order to be remembered by us, and survive for ever in our hearts, he shewed himself the best of friends.

It is strange, indeed, the King of Heaven and earth should have any concern at all to be remembered by us, poor worms of the earth; but it is much more astonishing he should be concerned for it to that degree, as to leave us the richest treasure Heaven could bestow, or earth receive, as a token to remember him by: for had he any prospect of advantage by our being mindful of him? Or did he fear to be a loser by being forgot by us? No, certainly; but he knew we should be great gainers by daily remembering him, and great losers by being unmindful of him; and that was a sufficient motive to him to desire to be always remembered by us: for the only reason why he desired it was, because he loved us, and desired to be reciprocally loved by us, as knowing it to be so much our true interest to love him, that as it was impossible we should be happy if we loved him not, so we could not but be truly happy if we loved him; and since a frequent remembrance of him would be a powerful means to create and nourish in our hearts a true love of him, he left us this precious Body and

Blood, in the sacrament of the holy Eucharist, as a subsisting memorial of him, and an everlasting token to remember him by.

The *second* motive why our Saviour would institute this heavenly banquet was, that we might for ever abide in him, and he in us; as is expressly declared in these words: *Whoever eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, abideth in me, and I in him*: Which words express the most perfect and mutual union we are capable of in this mortal life, and helps likewise to give us still a fuller idea of the greatness of our Saviour's love in this holy institution; for as all our love, whether of God or man, tends to a kind of union to the object of that love, so the more vehement the love is, the closer is the union it tends to: but whereas the perfectest love between man and man can never go beyond a moral union of hearts, our loving Saviour has, by means of the holy Eucharist, found out an expedient to unite himself really and truly to all that receive it: he lodges himself in our very breasts: he incorporates himself, as I may say, and becomes, as it were, one flesh with us; and therefore, this sacrament is, by some of the fathers, called a kind of *extension of the Incarnation;* that is, the union of God and man, enlarged and extended to all that are made partakers of it: for, by means of it, he communicates himself not only to one single man, but is rendered communicable to all the individuals of mankind: so that whoever partakes of this holy banquet, receives into himself really and substantially, the same divine person that once assumed our nature in the immaculate womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

It may also be called an *extension of the Incarnation;* because, as our Saviour was, by his incarnation, once really born of the Virgin Mary; so is he, by the holy Eucharist, spiritually re-born in the souls of all that receive him worthily: and therefore, as he never will be separated from the nature he once assumed, so the proper effect of the holy Eucharist is a permanent union with us, by sanctifying grace and charity: as is clearly insinuated by these words: *Whoever eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, abideth in me, and I in him:* For our Saviour says not, *Whoever eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood,* shall exchange a passing visit with me, and so part from me again; but *abideth in me, and I in him;* which imports a plain con-

demnation of those circular vicissitudes of rising and falling of grace and sin, life and death, and in a word, of communicating one day with Christ, and a few days after with the devil, but too much practised by habitual sinners: for surely, it never was our Saviour's intention to enter into us, as a passenger into a lodging, for a day or two, and so leave us; but to take a permanent possession of our hearts, to enter into them as an inseparable friend, as a domestic companion, to make his abode with us for ever, and become the source of a durable and lasting grace.

And therefore, those whose lives go round in a continual circle of communicating and relapsing into mortal sin, do not only frustrate our Saviour's principal intention, in the institution of this heavenly banquet, but have also great reason to fear, that though his sacred body has often entered into their stomachs, he has perhaps but seldom entered by his holy grace into their souls. It is true, the grace of the sacrament, effectually received, may be lost by the surprise of a violent temptation: but when relapses grow into a certain regular custom, it is much more to be suspected, that the grace of the holy Eucharist has been but seldom received, than constantly lost; because, as our Saviour tells us: *whoever eats his body, and drinks his blood;* that is, receives it worthily, *abides in Christ, and Christ in him.*

Thus then we see the greatness of our Saviour's love in instituting this heavenly banquet, discovered to us, *first*, by the vehement desire he had to bestow this blessing on us; and *secondly*, by the two motives of that desire, viz. that he might be always remembered by us, and most intimately united to us; whence we ought to form these three resolutions: *first*, to imitate the goodness of our Blessed Saviour, by doing good even to those who repay us with ingratitude; *secondly*, to fix in our hearts a lasting remembrance of him, with a deep sense of gratitude for the blessing received; and *lastly*, to live so, that Christ may abide in us, and we in him.

SIXTIETH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE RETURN WE USUALLY MAKE OUR SAVIOUR FOR HIS LOVE.

They begin all at once to make excuse. Luke xiv. 18.

I HAVE represented to you, in my former discourse, the greatness of our Saviour's love in instituting the sacrament of the holy Eucharist; I shall now make some reflections upon the returns we usually make him for it, which shall be the subject of this Entertainment.

The first circumstance, whereby we have discovered the greatness of our Saviour's love in instituting the holy Eucharist, was the earnest desire and longing he had to bestow this blessing on us; a desire so great, that no obstacle could put a stop to his intended bounty. But how do we correspond with this desire of our loving Saviour? Do we covet as earnestly to receive him, as he desires to communicate himself to us? Are we as ready to open our hearts to let him in, as he is to enter into them? Do we long and hunger after this bread of life, with such a craving appetite, that no obstacle whatsoever, no temporal concerns, no pleasures of this world can hinder us from satisfying our hunger? Alas, how far are we from this happy disposition! How far are we from making our Saviour this acceptable return! How truly, on the contrary, is the behaviour of many Christians represented in the parable, from whence I have taken my text, where we have this account of the guests invited to the supper: *They began all at once to make excuse.* One said, *he had bought a country-house, and must go see it.* Another alleged, *he had bought five yoke of oxen, and was going to try them:* A third gave for answer, *that he had married a wife, and therefore could not come.*

By the first of these characters are marked out those who spend their time in trifling amusements, which they make in a manner their whole employment. By the second character of him that *had bought oxen, and was going to try them,* are meant your men of business, whose whole time and thoughts are taken up with temporal concerns. Finally, by the third character, of him who *had married a wife, and therefore could not come,* are signified persons

wholly plunged in sensual pleasures: now these put off the invitation, and desired to be excused: and how lively a representation is this of the behaviour of many Christians, in reference to the great banquet of the Lord's supper, to which all are invited!

Some neglect to frequent the holy communion, merely out of a slothful and careless temper, and those are your tepid or lukewarm Christians. They are, for the most part, too conscientious on the one hand, to receive the holy Eucharist, without being in some measure disposed for it; and yet too slothful to prepare themselves on the other: they know they must do many things to be worthily disposed: they must retire from company, and be serious for some time; they must call themselves to an account by a strict examination of conscience, excite themselves to a hearty repentance, confess their sins, perform their penance, and be somewhat recollected before and after communion. But their natural sloth, which they are accustomed to gratify, gives them such a repugnancy to all these duties, that though they have often so much time lying on their hands, that they scarce know how to dispose of it, yet every trifling accident that throws itself in their way, as a party of pleasure, to go see something that invites their curiosity, suffices to make them put off their communion.

Others, again, are so taken up with temporal concerns, and overwhelmed with business, that, alas, they have no time to pay their attendance upon our Blessed Saviour at his supper; and therefore, these all, for the most part, put off the invitation, and desire to be excused; and whereas, the former are usually too slothful, these, on the contrary, are for the most part too full of business to save their souls. But there is a third sort that excuse themselves, upon a pretence yet worse than the former. Those I mean who are strongly addicted to sensual pleasures: God invites them often by his holy inspirations; but they know that to become partakers of his holy table, they must renounce their criminal engagements; they must throw off their old habits, and enter upon a new course of life. But finding their hearts too strongly engaged to resolve upon a thorough change, they refuse the invitation, and desire to be excused.

Thus we see how little the greatest part of Christians are disposed to comply with our Saviour's earnest desire of communicating himself to them. He invites, and they re-

fuse to come. He offers them his precious Body and Blood, and they prefer each petty interest or trifling satisfaction before him.

But how did the master of the feast receive the excuses of the parties invited? The gospel tells us that he was highly offended, and declared that *none of them all should ever taste his supper.* We cannot doubt but that a contempt, as well as abuse of God's favours, is a very grievous offence, and what we shall account for at the last day. Now, are we not guilty of a contempt of the inestimable blessing offered us in the holy Eucharist, when we neglect to receive it, either because we are unwilling to put ourselves to some trouble, or deprive ourselves of some small satisfaction, and offer some violence to our inclinations, for its sake? Is it not a convincing proof, that we prefer the enjoyment of a little ease or pleasure before it? And what is this but a barefaced contempt and under-valuing of it?

Nor can we doubt but this neglect becomes to many the first step to their everlasting ruin, and their falling under that terrible sentence of being eternally excluded from the banquet prepared in Heaven: for by depriving themselves of this spiritual food, the health of their souls is insensibly impaired; their virtues are, as it were, starved; their hearts poisoned with the world; their vital spirits, I mean the moistening grace of the Holy Ghost, dried up for want of this fountain of living waters; and finally, their whole souls scorched with the burning fevers of concupiscence, hatred, revenge, pride, avarice, and other such passions; Almighty God abandoning them to their own corruption, in punishment of their contempt of this holy banquet, which thus becomes the occasion of the death of their souls in this life, and their utter ruin hereafter.

And therefore, the devil, knowing how much the health and life of our souls depend upon this spiritual food, uses all means possible to draw us from it, imitating therein the policy of Holofernes, who having laid siege to Bethulia, and consulting with his officers about the shortest and easiest way to reduce it, was advised to possess himself of the fountains that supplied the town with water; for being deprived of these, it would be forced to surrender without battle or bloodshed. This is the very stratagem the devil makes use of to become, in a short time, master of our souls. He does all he can to hinder us from access to the

fountains of living waters, the body and blood of Jesus Christ; for he is sure we cannot hold out a long siege without it. A few weeks will easily consume the portion of grace, without which our souls cannot live spiritually: and this supply being intercepted, they must be starved of course, and surrender for want of this spiritual food.

But as we usually make our Saviour but very ill returns for the great desire he has to communicate himself to us, so when we have sometimes admitted him into our breasts, we have likewise, for the most part, but little regard to the principal motive of that desire; which is, *to abide for ever with us.* What cold entertainment do we usually give him! How little care do we take to digest this spiritual food, and convert it into solid nourishment! How soon do we grow weary of his company! A few distracted prayers huddled over in haste, and looking rather like a set form of ceremonious compliments, than sincere expressions of true love and affection, is all the entertainment we usually afford him. We seem to be afraid of his company, as the apostles were in the time of his passion, lest some scurrilous companion, observing us to be more devout than usual, should, in derision, put the same question to us as the maid put to St. Peter; *hast thou not been with* Jesus *this morning?* And truly we take care, for the most part, to disown him as much by our light and indevout comportment immediately after communion, as if we had not been in his company that day at all.

But no comparison represents our behaviour so well as that of the ungrateful Gerasens; who, soon after our Saviour's arrival amongst them, joined all in an unanimous petition to him, that he would forthwith depart from them. It is true, our behaviour is not so open and barefaced as theirs; but it is in effect the same. We seem to be afraid lest an attentive regard to his presence should be some curb upon our inclinations, or restrain the freedom of our merry entertainments, which rather than want for any time, we immediately dismiss him, and in a manner solicit his departure from us.

And this is one principal cause why, after so many communions, we are still so weak and inconstant, so subject to relapses, and defective in the performance of our daily duties. For it is not to be doubted but the effects of this sacrament would appear in a change of life, if we put no

obstacle to them, either by a want of preparation, or a negligent comportment after communion; for our Saviour deals many times with us, in this case, as we deal with him. If we stay with him, and keep our thoughts at home to bear him company, he also stays with us; and all the blessings he brings with him remain in our souls; but if we have little or no regard to his divine presence, if we resume forthwith our customary distractions, and so fly from him, and in a manner solicit his departure, truly he often takes us at our word, and withdraws himself from us, with the graces and blessings he had brought to enrich our souls: for he dealt just so with the forementioned Gerasens, who desiring him to quit their country, he took them at their word, *and departed from them.*

Thus it appears but too plainly what sort of returns we usually make our Saviour for his infinite love, in instituting this heavenly banquet. He desires most earnestly to communicate himself to us; and we are unwilling to take the trouble to prepare ourselves for so great a blessing: he invites us to his holy table, and we seek a hundred frivolous pretences to put off his loving invitation: he has left us this inestimable pledge of his love, as a lasting token to remember him by; and we seldom afford him a serious thought: finally, he covets nothing more than to abide for ever in us, and we shake him off as soon as he comes to us; sometimes by our indevout behaviour after communion, and other times by returning soon after to our vomit.

But is it to be always so? Shall we always continue in this slothful way, and never think of making him some better requital for his infinite love? Is there not a day to come wherein we shall be accountable for all favours, either neglected or abused? It is this we ought at present to reflect seriously upon, in order to work ourselves seriously into a sincere and hearty resolution; *first*, to correct whatever neglect we have hitherto been guilty of, in not having at due times frequented the holy sacraments; and, *secondly*, whenever this duty calls upon us, to perform it so as to answer fully all the ends for which these blessings were designed.

It were to be heartily wished, indeed, that all Christians would dispose themselves weekly for this holy table: However, since this is rather to be wished than hoped for, at least no business ought to hinder any one from communicating once a month. They ought to consider, that the holy

communion is the food and nourishment of their souls, which can no more live any considerable time without it, than their bodies can subsist without a competent allowance of meat and drink. And, therefore, as no pretence of business ever hinders them from nourishing their bodies, so it ought not to hinder them from nourishing their souls; and if any temporal concerns prevail upon them to neglect this duty, it is a manifest sign they have a greater concern for the one than the other; and this want of concern for their eternal interest, is a convincing proof, that they are already dangerously sick in soul.

Care, however, must be taken, that whoever approaches to the holy table, this duty be so performed that his soul may become partaker of the spiritual nourishment for which it is ordained. He must therefore receive the bread of angels with a deep sense of gratitude for so inestimable a blessing, a sincere acknowledgment of his own unworthiness, a firm belief of our Saviour's real presence, a hearty confidence in his infinite goodness, and an unfeigned love of him.

After communion, he must entertain the divine guest he has received with all the affections of his soul; unbosom his heart entirely to him; lay before him all his spiritual distempers; acknowledging his absolute dependance on him. He must importune him, with the two disciples of Emmaus to stay with him, to be the life and health of his soul, a preservative against the corruption of the world, his strength and security against all temptations, his support and comfort in his daily afflictions, and his guide to a happy eternity.

SIXTY-FIRST ENTERTAINMENT.

THE ADVANTAGE OF AFFLICTIONS.

Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God. Acts xiv. 21.

It is enough that it is God's eternal and unchangeable decree, that the way to heaven must be *through many tribulations.* This alone suffices to render our obligations of submitting to it indispensable; and it would be a criminal presumption to question the infinite wisdom and justice of God's law, or ask the Divine Creator why he has made us so? However, since all means appointed by God have a natural tendency to their end, we may be allowed to en-

quire how it is that prosperity obstructs, and adversity is naturally conducing to the eternal good of our souls; which I intend to do in this Entertainment, by shewing both the prejudice men usually receive by the one, and the advantages that usually attend the other.

I observe three great advantages in the sufferings of this life, which, if duly considered, will in a great measure allay their bitterness, and dispose us at least to a patient submission of them. *First*, they are a proper means to disengage the heart from a love of the world. *Secondly*, they are an occasion of our improvement in virtue; and, *thirdly*, they instruct us in the knowledge of ourselves. That they are a proper means to disengage the heart from the love of the world, is clearly insinuated in these words of Solomon, Prov. xvii. 3, *As silver is tried by fire, and gold in the furnace, so the Lord trieth the hearts.* For as fire not only tries, but refines gold, by separating it from its alloy, so Almighty God both tries the hearts of men in the furnace of adversity, and at the same time purifies them from the dross of earthly affections, which debase the soul, and sink her beneath the dignity of her spiritual nature; for, since man's soul is created to love and enjoy an infinite good, she degrades herself by setting her affections upon creatures, and to deliver her from this state of degradation, the love that causes it must be removed.

Now crosses and afflictions are the fittest for this purpose. The reason is, because since contrary causes cannot but produce contrary effects, it follows, that as we are naturally inclined to love those, by whom we find ourselves cherished and caressed, so we are no less apt to take a dislike to those who use us unkindly, and consequently, as it is the ordinary effect of prosperity to make us fond of the world, so nothing can be more proper to put us out of conceit with it than adversity. We need not use much violence to our inclinations, to quit a treacherous friend, there being no better cure for love than ill usage. As long as the world smiles upon us, as long as it is ready to flatter our inclinations, and every thing goes according to our hearts desire, it is a difficult task to wean our affections from it: but when the world turns cross and ill-natured; when instead of furnishing us with conveniencies and pleasures, it loads us with miseries and crosses, the work is more than half done to our hands, the main obstacle to God's grace being already

removed from us: Oh, then we are apt to reflect how treacherous a friend this world is, and how great a folly it is to set our hearts upon it: then we begin to see the vanity of earthly joys, and seek that happiness above, which we find the world either cannot, or refuses to afford us.

The rod and reproof give wisdom, says Solomon; and indeed, if anything will make us truly wise, the rod of afflictions is most likely to do it. Prosperity, like the fumes of wine, is but apt to turn the brain, and intoxicate the mind; and adversity is the proper remedy for this spiritual drunkenness: it opens our eyes, and discovers clearly the cheat and vanity of earthly goods, by giving us an experimental knowledge of their emptiness and inconstancy: it convinces the judgment, that the world is not the fine thing men usually take it to be, and when the judgment is once thoroughly convinced of this truth, the heart is in a fair way of being cured of its former dotage: and, therefore, when our heavenly physician sees us love-sick of the world, that ordinary remedies, I mean his ordinary inspirations, are ineffectual, and that we go on obstinately poisoning ourselves still more and more with the pleasures of it; his usual method in this case is, to take away from us these bewitching enjoyments, which chiefly nourished the distemper, that the cause of the evil being thus removed, his healing grace may meet no obstacle to hinder it from working a complete and perfect cure.

We have a remarkable figure of this truth in the person of the *prodigal son;* who, as long as he had means to gratify his passions, continued in all his irregular courses, and never thought of returning to his father; but as soon as he was deprived of those means, and extremity of want had put it out of his power to enjoy any longer his beloved pleasures, he immediately entered into himself, and began to reflect on the folly he had committed in leaving his father's house: whereupon he resolved to go, without delay, and throw himself at his father's feet, to make his peace with him.

Now, many imitate the undutifulness of this *prodigal son*, in removing themselves at a distance from their Heavenly Father, and giving themselves over to the sinful lusts and pleasures of this life; and this is usually the unhappy case of those that are blessed with plenty; their riches are, for the most part, made the instruments and support of vice; they grow wanton with ease and over pampering, and

prosperity makes them not only forget their benefactor, but even abuse him with his own gifts. I appeal to any man's observation, whether it be not so. For cast but an eye amongst sinners, and see who are the persons most remarkable for scandalous irregularities; are they not the rich who are the great patterns of lewdness, vanity, intemperance, idleness, and prodigality? Are they not your men of plentiful fortunes, who are furnished with means to be at the charge of those expensive vices? So that, upon a general view of mankind, it will appear that sin abounds most where temporal blessings are most plentifully bestowed.

And how then must these prodigals be reclaimed from their evil ways, and obliged to return to their Heavenly Father? Truly, where Almighty God has a peculiar mercy in store to retrieve those that are thus gone astray, affliction is the expedient he generally makes use of to prepare them for this blessing: and it is, without dispute, of all expedients the most natural: *first*, because it disarms their enemy, by taking away from them the things that took their hearts from God, and removing the main obstacle of their return to him: *secondly*, because it helps to weaken their passions, by depriving them of the objects that chiefly fomented them, and putting it out of their power to gratify them as formerly: and, *lastly*, by embittering the world to them, and making that become their cross which formerly was their delight; it obliges them to seek their comfort in the hopes of a better world hereafter: and thus it is our merciful Father many times withdraws the world from us, when he sees us obstinately resolved not to withdraw our affections from the world; compelling us, as it were, by this merciful expedient, to raise our hearts above the earth, and make heaven the chief object of our desires.

But as afflictions are a sovereign remedy against the love of the world, by way of cure, so are they no less useful by way of prevention, as is evident from all the reasons I have insisted upon, which hold for the one as well as the other: and it is not to be doubted, but when God sends afflictions to those whose hearts are yet untainted, he designs them for this end; and the mercy seems the greater, by as much as it is better to be wholly preserved from infection, than to stand in need of being cured of it. This is a solid comfort to all such as have ever been afflicted with poverty, and forced to earn their bread with hard toil and labour; for

when they consider how generally riches are abused, what numberless sins are occasioned by them, and how few of those that possess them give any hopes of their living in a state of salvation, they have reason enough to conclude, that if God had favoured them with plenty, they would, in all likelihood, have set their hearts as much upon the world, and made as ill use of his blessings as others: and that whereas their poverty, hard fare, and labour, have not only contributed to weaken their passions, but even put it out of their power to gratify them in any notorious manner, riches might have engaged them, as it has many others, in a thousand scandalous extravagancies, and been the cause of their everlasting ruin.

And ought they not then, instead of being always upon the fret, and apt to murmur at the dispensations of the Almighty; ought they not, I say, to be heartily content with their condition, and ever acknowledge a providential mercy, in their being kept out of the reach of those dangerous temptations, by which infinite numbers are daily overcome? Ought they not to count it a blessing to be deprived of such blessings, as through their abuse of them would, in all likelihood, have betrayed them into eternal curses? Truly, if they have any belief of a future state, or value for what may be a help to make them happy in it, this consideration must comfort them, at least so far as to quell all murmurs, and make them submit to the circumstances which the Almighty has appointed for them, with patience and peace of mind.

But to proceed to the two latter heads mentioned by me, both reason and experience teach us, that afflictions are not only a sovereign remedy against the love of the world, but an occasion of improvement in many excellent virtues; I need but instance in that of *humility*, which is the groundwork of all the rest; for we may confidently say, adversity is the mother, nurse, and guardian of it; since nothing is more rare than to find men truly humble in a prosperous and flourishing condition; because nothing is more difficult than to preserve an humble mind, when all things concur to inspire us with great ideas of ourselves. This made St. Austin say, that it is more than ordinary happiness not to be overcome with worldly felicity; and that it is much easier not to sink under adversity, than not to be elevated at prosperity.

The reason hereof is, because man's nature is much more inclined to pride than to dejection or despair; and stands more in need of humiliations than encouragements to keep the balance of the soul equal. Almost every trifle suffices to swell us with vanity; but it must be a very great load of misfortune will sink us into despair: for do we not find that any one good quality, whether of mind or body, though joined with many gross defects, both of the one and the other, suffices to make us set a value on ourselves? Are we not many times insolent and haughty with a little success, though blind chance had perhaps the greatest share in it? Will not a little applause or commendation, though ever so undeserved, nay, even barefaced flattery, exalt us in our own conceit? Nay, how many are puffed up with pride, merely upon the account of wealth, though they have nothing else to recommend them? How many again value themselves upon their constitution, a well-shaped body, a handsome face, a fine suit of clothes, a gaudy equipage, and such like fooleries? For pride is a passion of that strange nature, that it will even feed upon imaginary excellencies, and mere airy fancies, when it has nothing real and solid to subsist upon; whence we may gather how strongly nature is inclined to it, and how much we stand in need of some considerable counterpoise to balance the soul, and bring her down to a just pitch of Christian humility.

Now what can be more likely to do us this good office than crosses and afflictions; prosperity is, doubtless, only proper to add more fuel to the fire: for since we are so apt to be proud and vain, even when we have little or nothing to excite us to it, is it not evident that prosperity must needs heighten this passion to a very great degree, since almost every circumstance relating to that state contributes more or less to nourish the distemper? For, *first*, as to the power and authority that usually attend a plentiful fortune, is there anything more apt to raise men's thoughts, and swell them with high ideas of themselves? *Secondly*, As to the honour, respect, deference, and attendance, usually paid to those whom fortune smiles upon, do not all these things contribute to inflame the humour? *Lastly*, The exorbitant praises and flatteries, which are seldom wanting where anything is to be hoped for, are they not just so much oil thrown upon a flame?

Hence it is that prosperity has generally the unhappy

effect upon the minds of men, that whereas they see themselves distinguished from others in their fortunes, it makes them also fancy themselves distinguished from them in their intrinsic worth and value; and set up, as it were, for precious things, made of some better matter than their fellow-mortals, and only placed in the world to be respected, waited on, and idolized by them: nor is this any exaggeration, since both sacred and profane history furnish us with several instances of persons, whom a long course of prosperous fortune swelled to that height of pride, as to make them even forget they were men, and set up for gods. This indeed is the highest degree of madness, rather than pride: however, it shews what influence prosperity has upon the minds of men, and though it produces but seldom these monstrous effects, it generally raises us high enough to make us stand in need of very considerable humiliations, to bring us down to a moderate temper, and true Christian sense of ourselves.

Now, from the rule of contraries, it follows, that afflictions are the only natural course for this dangerous imposthume of the mind: for if prosperity causes, or at least inflames the distemper, afflictions must needs abate it: if prosperity swells the heart, afflictions cannot but be a means to humble it: and the reason is, because they make us enter seriously into ourselves, by putting us in mind that we are not only men, but in the lowest rank of men; that is, poor criminals, smarting under the scourge of divine justice, and only worthy of chastisements; which considerations lay the most solid foundation of Christian humility, and are the best cure for pride.

Thus the wicked Manasses, who insulted God on the throne, became humble and penitent, under the weight of his chains: thus likewise the proud Nabuchodonosor, who, in the height of prosperity, would needs be worshipped as a God; being dethroned, and reduced to a condition even beneath that of man, acknowledged the hand that struck him, and humbled himself under it: so that we may confidently say, this excellent virtue of humility is scarce ever secure but under the shelter of adversity: it is a plant that seldom grows in a rich soil; it is a child that thrives best under a strict and severe discipline: the smiles and caresses of fortune, like the over-indulgence of a fond mother, contribute only to its ruin. Many souls have been killed

with this sort of kindness, and many others owe their everlasting happiness to what the world calls misfortunes: How many sinners have been reclaimed this way! How many now are saints in Heaven, who must confess, that sickness, poverty, disgrace, or some other affliction, has been the happy occasion of their having been humbled into those dispositions which fitted them for the state of bliss! and that if the world had continued to smile upon them, their pride had brought them to their everlasting ruin!

Lastly, Afflictions, as I told you, instruct us in the knowledge of ourselves, by undeceiving us many times as to the false opinions we are apt to have of our own virtue: for men are strangely subject to delude themselves in this point, and mistake their speculative ideas of virtue for virtue itself. How many, whilst they had nothing to trouble them, have strangely fancied themselves able to suffer anything for God's sake! But when it came to the trial have found, by sad experience, they were not the courageous men they took themselves for, and were taught to know themselves better. Thus, whilst the danger was at a distance, St. Peter valued himself upon his courage, and boasted he would rather die than deny his Master: but being put to the proof, his heart failed him, and his fall instructed him in the knowledge of his own weakness.

And so it happens many times with us: we are stout as heroes as long as the enemy is out of sight: we think we can suffer great matters as long as there is nothing to suffer: Some hot fit of devotion warms the imagination into many strong-fancied resolutions: we make acts of *patience*, *humility*, *resignation*, to the will of God, and so forth: and though all this be no more than the bravery of soldiers in a mock fight, we are apt to believe ourselves to be, in effect, what we then seemingly resolve to be: but in the day of battle it appears what we truly are. We may then certainly inform ourselves, whether our patience, humility, and resignation to the will of God, be real, or only imaginary: and therefore, afflictions are, in the scripture-language, called *trials;* because they are the proof of virtue: they are the touch-stone upon which it is tried, and by them we may infallibly know whether it be true or counterfeit gold; and whether it be in the heart, as well as in the intellect or imagination.

You see then what considerable advantages afflictions

bring with them; how sovereign a remedy they are against the poisonous love of the world; how they cure us of our pride, and instruct in the knowledge of ourselves: and are not these advantages considerable enough to challenge, at least, an hearty submission to any affliction Almighty God shall send us? It is evident, they contribute to facilitate our passage to a better life; at least by removing obstacles, and diminishing the dangers of it: and therefore, whoever has a true concern for his eternal interest, cannot reasonably be dissatisfied, if God wills to allot him his portion amongst the sufferers in this life; since in so doing, he only takes care to put him in a safer way to Heaven than he would have chosen, had he been left to carve for himself; and ought not then all suffering Christians to be sensible, that God has dealt favourably with them, in having secured them from the dangers by which thousands have perished eternally? Ought they not to forbear murmuring, submit cheerfully to their condition; when it is manifest, that all the reason they have to murmur is, because Almighty God has removed them out of the occasion of making themselves unhappy for ever? Here, surely, is motive enough to make them be at least resigned, even under the heaviest crosses; and pray to God, with their whole hearts, that his holy will may ever be accomplished.

SIXTY-SECOND ENTERTAINMENT.

MOTIVES OF COMFORT IN THE SUFFERINGS OF THIS LIFE.

John in chains. Matt. xiv. 3.

John in prison, and loaded with chains, is both the comfort and instruction of all suffering Christians. He is their comfort, in giving them occasion to reflect, that if Almighty God permit them now to be afflicted, they receive no harder measure than his best friends have done before them: he is also their instruction in teaching them, that suffering in this life is the ordinary portion of the just; because most proper to fit them for the joys of the life to come. It is true, self-love cannot relish this Christian philosophy, being ever apt to consider afflictions on their most unfavourable side, and as they are a grievance to nature, under which consideration there appears nothing in them but what creates uneasiness and aversion.

However, since we find, by experience, that the most loathsome and painful remedies are cheerfully submitted to by the patient, because he hopes to find ease and benefit by them; it is also to be hoped, that if we consult Faith, and reason directed by it, we may discover such solid motives of comforts in the sufferings of this life, as will suffice to make us receive them with the most cheerful submission: the proper motives therefore to work in us this Christian disposition, shall be the subject of this discourse.

The *first* consideration which ought to make us receive afflictions with a cheerful submission, is that they are a mark and pledge of God's love. The history of Tobias gives us an undoubted instance of this truth: this holy man had been, from his infancy, brought up in the fear of God, and practice of all religious duties: but the virtue he most excelled in, was his unwearied charity to his afflicted brethren; whom in the time of their captivity, he relieved to the utmost of his power, and even with the hazard of his life. Almighty God had many ways tried the virtue of his faithful servant, and at length was pleased to visit him with the loss of both his eyes; which affliction, though very grievous in itself, was much aggravated by the unjust reproaches of his wife and kindred; who, instead of comforting him in his misfortune, insulted over him: accusing him of weakness and folly for having vainly trusted in God; and asking him in a reproachful manner, if these were the fruits of his past alms and good works.

But Almighty God soon after convinced them of their error; and made it appear that the affliction he had sent his servant was not a mark of his anger, but a token of his favour: for when the angel Raphael, who had conducted his son in his journey to Rages, and back again, was upon the point of discovering himself, he first assured him that his alms and works of mercy had been highly pleasing to God, and then told him that the true reason why God had sent him so great an affliction was, because he was acceptable to him. *And because thou wert acceptable to God, it was necessary that affliction should try thee.*

But let the case of St. John Baptist, as it is represented in the gospel whence I have taken my text, serve for a second instance of this truth. He was undoubtedly a particular favourite of Heaven, and a person of extraordinary merit, as having been miraculously sanctified in his mo-

ther's womb; chosen by God to be the forerunner of the Saviour of the world, and honoured by Christ himself with the greatest character that was ever given of any man: and yet this child of God, this darling of Heaven, and favourite of Jesus Christ, is thrown into prison, and loaden with chains, expecting hourly the stroke of death, whilst the wicked and incestuous Herod enjoyed a prosperous reign, and wallowed in all the pleasures the world could afford him: and is not this again an evident proof that sufferings are the ordinary portion of the just in this life, and pledges of their being in God's favour.

However, not to content ourselves with a few particular instances of this nature, let us take a view of all the known and celebrated saints since the creation of the world, down to this very age, and we shall find they were all made to drink large draughts of the bitter cup of afflictions. In the *first* place, we shall meet with innumerable champions of Christ let loose to the brutal rage and malice of the bloodiest tyrants: *secondly*, innumerable confessors made the scorn and reproach of men, and infinite numbers undergoing a lingering martyrdom, in banishments or prisons, in the loss of friends, forfeiture of estates, painful sicknesses, and, in a word, in all the hardest trials of poverty, abjection, and contempt. Now were not all these eminent sufferers God's peculiar friends, and the darlings of Heaven? they were undoubtedly so. And therefore, since we find that Almighty God has ever been pleased to carry his best servants through the most painful trials, and that not one of those whose eternal happiness we are unquestionably assured of, has been exempt from sufferings, nothing is more evident than that afflictions are favours, which God bestows upon his best servants as the most undoubted marks and pledges of his love.

St. Paul is very large upon this argument, in his epistle to the Hebrews, chap. xii. His words are very remarkable, and challenge a particular attention. *My son*, (says he,) *neglect not the discipline of the Lord; neither be thou wearied whilst thou art rebuked by him: for whom the Lord loveth he chastiseth, and he scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. Persevere under discipline. God dealeth with you as with his sons: for what son is there whom the father doth not correct? But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are made partakers; then are you bastards,*

and not sons. You see St. Paul lays it here down for an undoubted maxim, *that God chastises all he loves;* that to be scourged by him is to be treated as a *son;* and that there is no having a share in God's favour without being a sufferer in this life; in a word, to be afflicted, according to St. Paul, is to be marked with the character of the *elect;* and to be without affliction is to bear the mark of a *reprobate,* and one excluded out of the number of God's children.

Truly, if we consider these words of the apostle as divine oracles, and prompted by the spirit of truth, the prosperity of this world, instead of yielding any comfort, would be a strange alarm to such as are allowed an undisturbed enjoyment of it; and, on the contrary, whenever Almighty God should please to visit us with any affliction, instead of being dejected under it, and giving way to melancholy and sadness, we should receive it with joy, and not only submit to, but even kiss the hand that chastises us. All our complaints and murmurs would be turned into praises and thanksgivings. We should reason thus with ourselves: it is my loving Father has presented me with this token of his kindness; he has visited me with this gentle correction, to shew he has not yet utterly cast me off, as my sins have deserved: he is still pleased to treat me as one of his children, though I have many times forfeited my title: and ought I not then to be cheerfully resigned to his divine pleasure? Ought I not to praise and bless his holy name, for thus correcting me in his mercy, instead of punishing me in his wrath? These I say, would be the sincere sentiments of our hearts, if we considered things with eyes of Faith, and not merely as they are agreeable or disagreeable to flesh and blood.

But if, without pretending to pry into God's secret counsels, we may, for the improving and strengthening of our faith, be allowed to consider the reasons why God should treat his servants with this seeming rigour: the *first* that offers itself is, because God's love of the predestinate consists chiefly in his deserving and procuring them real and substantial good. Now, man's greatest good in the world is to contemn the world, and make Heaven the sole object of his desires. And since, as I have shewn in my preceding discourse, prosperity is apt to draw the heart from God, and fix it upon creatures, therefore Almighty God, to preserve those he loves from this misfortune, takes care the world shall be uneasy to them, and so give them no encourage-

ment to be fond of it, but oblige them to seek their content elsewhere. And who sees not that there is so much goodness and mercy in this expedient, though seemingly severe, as to deserve the most grateful acknowledgments our hearts can make him for it.

The *second* is, because since even the most virtuous Christians are subject to many sinful imperfections, and all sin whatsoever must be satisfied for, either in this world or the next: Almighty God, who knows to what rigour the very last farthing will be exacted hereafter, is graciously pleased to furnish those he loves with means to satisfy his justice at a much easier rate, by obliging them to suffer something in this life, which being offered up in the spirit of penance, his goodness, in consideration hereof, is willing to release the great debt, either wholly or in part, which they were otherwise obliged to pay. So that suffering in this world, if but rightly managed, and not rendered useless by a wilful indiscretion, is as great an advantage to sinners as it would be to a person overwhelmed with debts, to have it in his power to clear them all, or at least discharge the greater part, by only making an acknowledgment of some inconsiderable trifle to his creditors. And as it would be an act of uncommon generosity in a creditor, not only to accept of, but even to furnish his debtors with means to make him this acknowledgment; so we cannot sufficiently admire the divine bounty for putting into our hands the opportunity of cancelling, with so much ease, the great debt we have contracted with him.

The *third* and last reason is, because Christ, who is the pattern of all Christians, having been pleased to choose a suffering life for himself, it is requisite that every Christian should be conformable to him in this point: *First*, because, as the gospel tells us, *the perfection of a disciple consists in being like his master:* And *secondly*, because, according to St. Paul's doctrine, God has decreed that one condition necessary to prepare the predestinate for the state of bliss, shall be their *conformity to the image of his Son.* Whence it follows, that by their being sufferers like him, they are perfected in this life, and fitted for the life to come: and so it is no wonder that the love God bears the predestinate should prompt him to furnish them with suitable means to procure them this double blessing.

Hence follows another comfortable consideration, where-

with I will end, to wit, that the afflictions of this life entitle us to everlasting joys: for the same divine lips that pronounced this terrible sentence, *Woe be to you who laugh, for ye shall weep hereafter,* have also delivered this comfortable truth, *blessed are they who weep, for they shall be comforted;* and our Saviour had no sooner told his apostles, that *the world should rejoice, and they should be sorrowful,* but he immediately allayed the bitterness of this sentence with the following promise, *but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.* Our dear Redeemer calls us indeed to a share in his sufferings, but upon these advantageous terms, that we shall hereafter be partners with him in his glory; he invites us now to a part of his bitter cup, but upon a promise to admit us hereafter to the full torrent of heavenly delights. And is not this a solid comfort to a Christian soul? Is it not a cordial to revive our spirits under the heaviest load of afflictions? Can we be unwilling to suffer upon terms of such advantage? To pass through short afflictions to eternal rest? To endure some small pain or trouble, for a happiness that will never end?

For are not all sufferings short and small, when compared with joys that are infinite and everlasting? St. Paul allows them in a manner no duration at all in the comparison; but calls them *light and momentary:* nay, they might justly be called *momentary,* though they should last a man's whole life without intermission; because even the very longest term of years we can imagine, has less proportion to eternity than one single minute has to whole ages. Now, who of us all would not be willingly afflicted for some moments, upon condition he were to be completely happy his whole life after? And ought we not then even to rejoice in the afflictions of this life, since a whole eternity of joys may be purchased with them.

Hear how our Saviour presses this argument to his apostles? *Blessed are ye,* (says he,) *when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake; rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in Heaven.* You see he pronounces them blessed when they shall be under persecution and affliction; and exhorts them *to rejoice and be exceeding glad:* And why so? *Because their reward is great in Heaven.* This has been the comfort of all saints that have gone before us: they have all passed through many tribu-

lations to the kingdom of Heaven. They were content to *sow in tears*, because they were assured they should hereafter *reap in joy*. Let this then also be our comfort; let the hope and expectation of those blessed joys support us under the sufferings of this life; and when the weight of any trouble begins to press hard upon the soul, let us reflect that crosses and afflictions are the kindest pledges of God's love, the surest marks of predestination, and the seeds of everlasting glory.

These considerations, if often repeated, and deeply imprinted in the mind, will by degrees work nature into a ready acquiescence to whatever Almighty God shall ordain: not that they will utterly stifle all inward disturbances, or prevent all sudden surprises of grief; for flesh and blood will have their grains of allowance; constitution and temper must also be considered: nor can the workings of an unruly imagination be altogether suppressed: but the purpose they are chiefly designed to be serviceable to, is to keep the heart at least in steady subjection to the will of God, even whilst the sensitive part of the soul seems to mutiny and rebel: if they have not force enough to dispel all clouds of sadness, they will at least so far hinder them from darkening the soul, that the light of Faith and Reason will still have the chief direction of her: finally, they will moderate our grief, and keep it under restraint, though they cannot utterly destroy it. This, I say, is the use they are intended for; and therefore when I said that the forementioned considerations will make us receive afflictions, not only with patience, but even with joy, my meaning is not, that we shall be delighted with the painful part of our sufferings, but that in spite of their disagreeableness to sense and nature, we shall find motives enough to rejoice in them; not for their own sake, but as the will of God is considered in them, and for the blessing they entitle us to: so that whilst the body is smarting under the scourge, the soul may be filled with comfort and joy, in seeing herself in so good a way to the secure and everlasting possession of the infinite good for which she is created.

THE END.

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